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KOVALAN AND KANNAKI

(The Story of the 'Silappadikaram' Re-told)



(Second, revised and enlarged edition)

BY

A. S. PANCHAPAKESA AYYAR, M.A., I.C.S., BAR-AT-LAW,

(Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom)



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INTRODUCTION

The moving and highly dramatic story of "Kovalan and Kannaki" is

contained in the famous Tamil epic, *Silappadikaram*, dating from about the second century A. D. It and its sequel, *Manimekalai*, are the two most celebrated of the five Tamil Epics. The other three are *Jeevaka-chintamani*, *Valaiyapati* and *Kundalakesi*, the last two existing only in fragments now, no complete manuscripts being available. All the three are more coloured than the *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, being akin to *Dasakumaracharitam*, *Kadambari* and *Kathasaritsagara* in this respect, and, therefore, far later, the seventh century A. D. being their approximate date. From the day the *Silappadikaram*, and *Manimekalai* were published, till to-day, the Tamils have been rightly proud of these two Epics. The *Manimekalai* is more abstruse and philosophical, as it treats of a beautiful young maiden who prefers love divine to human love, and enters a monastery at an age when maidens of her age would be entering wedlock. The *Silappadikaram*, on the other hand, treats of the married life of Kovalan and Kannaki, and then grapples with the problem of the eternal triangle

caused by the entrance of Madhavi into Kovalan's life, almost to the entire exclusion of Kannaki. That phase passes, and Kovalan returns
to Kannaki, and is forgiven.
Both then set out for Madura to start life anew, and meet with tragedy in its grimmest aspect. Kovalan is execu-

ted unjustly; Kannaki proves his innocence to the King; the King and Queen die of shock; and Madura is consigned to flames.

There, perhaps, a western dramatist might have ended the story. But, in India, where tragedy is the commonest thing in real life, it is considered bad art to end a story in a tragedy, leaving the forces of evil to
audience in tears. So, there is

triumph, and the
the happy ending,

and the ultimate triumph of good. Kannaki goes westwards to Murugan's hill (Palni) and is taken

bodily from there, by Indra himself, to heaven, in a divine chariot, by the side of her husband, the murdered Kovalan, alive and resplendent once more. Kannaki is worshipped as the Goddess of Chastity, and a fine temple constructed for her by the Chera Emperor Senguttuvan, with an idol carved out of a stone got specially from the Himalayas to symbolise the divine nature of her unshakeable devotion to her husband, for God has declared, in the *Gita*, "Of all unshakeable things, I am the Himalayas".

An early editor of the *Silappadikaram* has added a sequel that, after Kovalan's unjust execution, the entire Pandyan Kingdom was visited by a terrible drought and famine, Indra witholding the rains, and punishing the country-side, for the iniquitous act of the King, just as Agni had punished the capital by burning it down, and rains came, and the famine ceased,

only after the younger brother and successor of Nedun Jeliyan, Vetrivel Cheliyan, who was

Viceroy of Korkai during his brother's life-time and succeeded him to the throne, had installed a temple to the Goddess of Chastity in the Pandya country, and sacrificed a thousand goldsmiths to her, and instituted an annual festival in *Adi* in her honour. He adds that, on seeing the timely rains and freedom from famine ensured by the worship of the Goddess of Chastity, the Chola King Perumkilli, the Kongu monarch and Gajabahu of Ceylon built temples to her in their lands too, and instituted festivals in her honour in the same month of *Adi*, and got like good res ults.

About Ilango Adigal, the author of the *Silap- padikaram*, we know very little, as about all ancient Indian authors in general. He was the younger son of the Chera King, Cheralattan, and the younger brother

of Senguttuvan. One day, when Cheralattan was sitting in court, with his two sons, an astrologer went in, cast the horoscope of the King, and predicted the early death of Cheralattan and the accession of his younger son to the throne. Senguttuvan, the elder brother, was very greatly perturbed at this. To allay his fears, Ilango at once became a *sanyasin* (who could never become a King), and removed himself from the palace, as befitted a monk, and took up his residence in a choultry in the suburbs of Vanjikkaravur called *Kunavayirkottam.*

We do not know even the name of this remarkable man, *Ilango* being merely a title

signifying "Junior Prince", and *Adigal* being an honorific title for a Jain or Hindu monk. But we do know that Ilango Adigal was a highly cultured man, and that he had a coterie of equally cultured friends, Sattanar, the author of the *Manimekalai*, being one, Kapilar and Paranar, being among the others. Sattanar was a very severe literary critic. He used to pierce his head with his steel style every time he detected a

mistake in the manuscripts he read, so much so that his head festered with such sores, and he was known popularly as "Sàttanar of the Suppurating Head!" That such a man continued to be the intimate and admiring friend of Ilango Adigal is itself a tribute to Ilango's learning and style, which are amply evident from a perusal of the *Silappadikaram* itself.

The *Silappadikaram* is a *Kavyam*, like Magha's *Sisupalavadha* in Sanskrit, and so describes all aspects of social life, births, marriages and deaths, wars, processions and sacrifices, sunrise, noon, sunset, twilight and night, trees, flowers and

plants, animals, birds and reptiles, mountains, rivers and seas, and even gods, spirits and devils, all in the arresting *champu* style of the most approved and effective rhetoric of those days, with its inevitable exaggeration, like describing a mortal wound as death itself.

Ilango did not go round the courts singing the praises of the Kings, as did other poets and authors of those days, as he was a prince of the blood and was amply provided for by his brother,

V

the King. He was a genial soul and gladly took part in Vedic sacrifices and in the installation of Kannaki's idol in the temple erected by his brother, despite his *sanyasa*. His creation of the character of Kannaki, as an embodiment of militant chastity (*seerinu karpu*,) as opposed to the settled chastity (*arina karpu*) of Sita, is a unique achievement. Sita was *born* a goddess, while Kannaki was born a woman and *became* a goddess. Ilango rightly therefore, made Kannaki's chastity, when

roused and offended, of an angry type, more suited for human beings.

The *Silappadikaram* is written by a master; its Tamil is sweet and forcible; it has got several musical pieces. though we have perhaps lost the key to them; and the dramatic force is real and gripping. As a love story, it need not fear comparison with the greatest love stories of the world, like Nala and Damayanti, Satyavan and Savitri, Romeo and Juliet, or Abelard and Heloise. Unlike the heroines in those other stories, Kannaki had, in Kovalan, a faithless lover who forgot her for years and lived with another woman. Yet, such is the Hindu ideal that, instead of her love waning, Kannaki's love for Kovalan actually increases. She has for her God only Kovalan, and refuses to worship any other God even to restore Kovalan to her! It is this unselfish love, based on a fixed religio-ethic principle, and refus- ing to treat love as a thing based on reciprocity, like an article of merchandise, that is the peculiar contribution of India to the love literature

of the

world, and this lesson is driven home to the reader the more effectively by this love-story being about a couple of the common trading community, and not of the powerful Brahman or Kshatriya community. When her idol, Kovalan, is unjustly killed, Kannaki takes terrible revenge, with the fanaticism of a devotee whose idol has been dese- crated and broken.

The *Patni*-cult (the worship of the chaste wife), thus started had a run of over a thousand years, undiluted with any cult, and survives even now in the Droupadi-Amman cult with the hair- raising fire-walking ceremonies, and the *Bhaga- vati* cult of Malabar with its twin aspects of a beneficent and malificent deity. The *Bhagavati* of the famous temple at Cranganore in Cochin State is single-breasted, like Kannaki after the great fire, and the *Bharani*, the anniversary of the Madura fire, is celebrated by tens of

thousands there, and thousands of cocks (representing, by their golden crests, the goldsmiths) are sacrificed. This tenacious survival of the *Patni* cult on the West Coast is, perhaps, one of the many arguments in favour of Senguttuvan's capital, Vanjikkaruvur, having been Tiruvanjikkalam on the West Coast, rather than Karur in Trichinopoly District, as contended by some scholars, other arguments being the practical impossibility of ruling Malabar, west of the ghats, from Trichinopoly Karur as capital, the improbability of the comparatively weaker Cheras having their capital so close to Uraiyur, the seat of the

Chola tiger, and the fact that, even now, the Maharaja of Travancore is called *Vanjibhupati* and his national anthem *Vancheesamangalam*.

The Drama "Kovalan" is still popular on the Tamil stage, though the story is distorted and mangled, and deprived of much of its terrible force and dramatic

effect. Madhavi is shown as an ordinary dancing-girl, instead of the grand romantic figure in the Epic; and Kannaki is shown as a helpless cast-away wife, instead of the heroic self-sacrificing woman with very great force of will and character.

In re-telling the story for the benefit of the English-reading public, my intention has been to give them some idea of the great Epic tale, and also of Tamil life and ideals. It will be noticed that the tale bears ample evidence of Brahminical, Jain and Buddhist influence, though the core and spirit of it are certainly Tamil. It is remarkable that, while Sanskrit heroes and heroines are mostly Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the hero and heroine here are Vaisyas and merchants. The Tamils always concerned themselves more with the common people, and were more democratic in the real sense, than the Aryans who were obsessed with their four-fold caste-system with its unpardonable preference for the first two castes.

who monopolised almost everything great or good in this world, or the other world, and even in the world of fiction.

The Epic reveals happy relations between all the castes, tribes and sects. One will search in

vain for religious or communal bitterness in the *Silappadikaram* or *Manimekalai*. Brahmins, Ajivakas, Jains, Buddhists, Animists, Heretics and Atheists hob-nob one another. Most people go to all temples, to whichever sect they may happen to belong. Jain preachers preached non-violence in one place; Buddhists turned the Wheel of Dharma in another; Brahmins chanted their Vedas and performed their sacrifices in a third; Maravas offered human and animal sacrifices in a fourth.

Beneficent Siva, Dancing Krishna, Jovial Balarama, Genial Sasta, Sporting Skanda, Pompous Indra, Scorching Surya, and Cool Chandra had their temples side by side with those of Teerthankaras and Arhats

and Sakya Muni. Even the *followers* of these gods exchanged few words of bitterness. The usual words they said, when they differed, were, "You go your way; we go ours," as Kavundi told the Brahmin Madalan.

The standard of living was high among the rich; the food, the dress, and the ornaments were varied and costly. Dancing, singing, painting, architecture and other fine arts were well develop- ed. The Kings were powerful, but were easily accessible to all persons with a grievance. Their sense of justice was very high, and the subjects were, on the whole, happy. The Brahmins were respected, but were not allowed to dominate the country, or to dictate to others, as in later days. The caste-system was not rigid, as now, and

pressed much more lightly on the lower strata,

being far more elastic.

Miracles were believed in, and dreams

about future occurrences were held to be almost in-evitable. Dancing-girls were numerous, and highly accomplished; and even Kings, Princes, Brahmins, and married men freely resorted to them, without any social stigma being attached to it. The Epic, has much to say about the Goddess of Chastity, and nothing at all about the God of Chastity, a concept probably unheard of in those days. In that respect, the Tamil author lined up with his Sanskrit brother who too talked of *Pativratas* (faithful wives), but never of *Patnivratas* (faithful husbands), with the solitary exception of Sri Rama. Kannaki's burning Madura to ashes has its parallel, in

Sanskrit, in Damayanti's burning the lustful forester to ashes.

The foisting of the false theft case on Kovalan has a parallel, in Sanskrit, in the foisting of the murder case on Charudatta in *Mrichchakatika*.

The stories showing the effect of *Karma* and of Re-birth have many parallels in Sanskrit.

The general ideal of *Dharma* is the same as in Sanskrit, namely, that of the Hindus, including therein Buddhists and Jains also. This common Hindu ideal was the creation of all the races, tribes and cultures of India, and not of one race, whether of the North or South, East or west.

This common Hindu culture had been

evolved even by the time of the earliest Sanskrit or Tamil books. A curious feature of this culture is the

graded morality according to one's status in life and rank, the higher ones being expected to be more sensitive to moral ideas. Thus, while the Vaisya, Kovalan, on realising the injustice he has done to Kannaki, merely sheds tears and implores her forgiveness, Nedun Jeliyan, the Kshatriya King, on realising the injustice he has done to Kovalan, dies of shock.

I have filled in certain details about which the Epic is silent. These are however, clearly implied in certain passages in the Epic, and are in consonance with its spirit.

The morality of the *Kural* was largely followed in Tamil Nadu in those days, and I have, therefore, drawn on the *Kural* in some places. As at least one verse from the *Kural* (Verse 55) has been bodily quoted in the *Silappadikaram* and the *Manimekalai*, there is no question of anachronism in doing this.

After I had finished writing this story, Sri Ramachandra Dikshitar's excellent English translation of the *Silappadikaram* came out. I have gone through it before revising the story for the press, and safely recommend it to all those who want to have an accurate knowledge of the contents of the *Silappadikaram* but are

unable to do so in the original Tamil.

In conclusion, I trust that this book will make Tamils take a genuine pride in their own past, and show it in the only legitimate way possible, namely, by enriching their mother-tongue with modern *Silappadikarams* and *Manimekalais*;

and will also make them shed their fear that Sanskrit and Hindi will ever succeed in depriving Tamil of its pride of place in *Tamil Nadu*, any more than the *Ganges* and *Jumna* can replace the waters of the *Kaveri* for the irrigation of the southern fields. I trust, too, that this book will help people outside *Tamil Nadu* to understand the Tamils and their culture better.

A. S. P. AYYAR.



KOVALAN AND KANNAKI

CHAPTER I

The marriage of Kovalan and Kannaki

EIGHTEEN hundred years ago, the city of Kaverippumpattinam, or Puhar,[1] was the capital of the powerful Chola King claiming descent from the Sun[2] and Sibi,[3] and having the

1. It was also called Pattinam and Kakandi. It is the *Khaberis Emporium* in the famous geography of Ptolemy, written in the second century A. D. in eight volumes. The present town of Kaveripattinam in Tanjore District represents this ancient town. This is conclusively proved by several inscriptions.

2. Some kings of ancient India, like the Kosalas and Cholas, claimed to be descended from the Sun; others, like the Purus, Cheras and Pandyas, claimed to be descended from the Moon; still others, like the *Agnikula* Rajputs, from *Agni* or Fire; and yet others, like the Oriya *Gangavamsis*, from the Ganges.

3. Sibi was a great King noted for justice and self-sacrifice. He saved a dove from an eagle, which had seized it for food, by giving the eagle his own flesh equal in weight to the dove. He ruled in the Indus valley.

dreaded Tiger Flag on his war chariot. It lay like a queen on the estuary of the Kaveri. The river itself was a gift of the sage Agastya,* the patron saint of the Tamil country; who had allowed his water-pot, when doing severe penance on the Brahmagiri Hills for the prosperity of *Tamil Nadu*, to be upset and to become the Kaveri, at the request of King Kavera, an ancestor of Karikala.

Kaverippumpattinam had an enormous trade with the lands to the east, north, south and west. It was the emporium for the whole Chola country which stretched from the Tirupati Hills and the *Kakandi Nadu* in the Nellore District, in the north, to the Vellar river, in the south, from the Bay of Bengal, in the east, to the confines of the Chera Kingdom, in the west. Karikala

---

* The twin brother of Vasishtha, and the author of several hymns in the Rig Veda. He is also a narrator of *Brahma Purana*. He was, according to the legends, born in a water-pot, and is there- fore called *Kumbhayoni*,

Kumbha-Sambhava, Kalasi-suta, Ghatod- bhava etc. He swallowed and digested a man-eating demon, Vatapi, and crossed over to the extreme south of India where he became the *guru* of the Tamil Kings, inventing for them the Tamil alphabet and grammar. He lived in the Podiyil Hills (Agastyakutam in Travancore), and did severe penance for Tamil Nadu, in the Brahmagiri Hills in Coorg and brought about the Kaveri. He subse- quently drank up the ocean, in order to reveal to the gods the demons which had hidden there. He married Lopamudra, the beautiful princess of Vidarbha. He even went to Sumatra and Java, spreading Aryan and Dravidian culture there. He is still worshipped in those islands. He represents the indivisible unity of Dravidian and Aryan culture and the futility of dividing, or even distinguishing, them. He is the regent of the star *Canopus* in the constellation *'Argo'*.

THE MARRIAGE OF KOVALAN AND KANNAKI 3

immensely increased
perity. He built fine

its fame, beauty and pros-
palaces and temples, with

wonderful gardens
famous floodbanks

and parks. He put up the on the Kaveri for a hundred miles, constructed a big dam and innumerable irrigation canals with the labour of his own subjects and of 12,000 prisoners of war taken from Ceylon, and made Tanjore District the granary of the south, and Puhar a busy seaport for the export of rice, in addition to its already thriving trade in pearls and corals, salt, sandalwood and spices. He increased the prestige of his kingdom and capital by undertaking a *digvijaya** right up to the Himalayas where he carved his Tiger emblem on a range named ever thereafter the 'Chola Range,' reached after crossing a pass named by him the

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* A triumphal march of a Hindu King in order to assert his overlordship. It was of three different kinds, namely, *Dharma-vijaya*, or a march in mere assertion of superior virtue; *Lobhavijaya*, a plundering expedition like that of Malik Kafur; and *Asuravijaya*, which involved the annexation and rule of the territories overrun after slaughtering the former Kings and their heirs. Karikala's expedition, as well as that of Senguttuvan Chera and Imayavaramban Pandya, was of the *Dharmavijaya* type, which, of course, was very rarely resisted by others, as it involved nothing more than a

triumphal march accompanied by gifts to scholars and Brahmans, and extensive poor feeding. That Karikala did march up to the Himalayas seems probable, from the great *Chola Range* in the Himalayas, in Sikkim, near Kanchenjunga, and the *Chola Pass* there. There is nothing but literary evidence regarding the Pandya and Chera expeditions. Though the *Silappadikaram* asserts that the Bow crest of the Cheras and the Fish crest of the Pandyas were planted on the Himalayas, like the Tiger crest of the Cholas, no range or place or pass in the Himalayas is named after the Cheras or Pandyas.

'Chola Pass'; by defeating the Nagas and annex- ing Negapatam ; by defeating the Chera King at the battle of Venni ; and by a victorious invasion of Ceylon. In addition to the already existing Indra festival of 28 days from the full moon in *Chaitra*,[1] begun by his ancestor Thodithod Sembiyan, he instituted the Festival of the First Freshes in the Kaveri and made the gay city of Puhar even more famous for its joyous and care-free life. It became celebrated for its wealth and pleasures like the land of the *Uttarakurus*.[2]

The city had a diameter of three miles

from one end to the other. It was divided into two broad divisions, the Maruvurpakkam, adjoining the harbour, where the tall terraced houses of prosperous *Yavanas* and prosperity never waned,

other foreigners, whose and the crowded bazaars and godowns were located. Sailors from distant lands were to be seen there, and the babel of languages heard there[3] was amazing. The___

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1. *Chithirai*, which begins the Tamil year even now. It runs, roughly, from 14th April to 14th May.

2. A mythical region north of the Himalayas where people were said to live happily for thousands of years. It is curious that even the late *Sadhu* Sundara Singh is said to have found a sage aged 450 years, in these regions, early in the 20th century!

3. So too, in *Manimekalai*, we find that eighteen languages (even now, the major languages spoken in India are only below eighteen), were spoken in Kanchi (Conjeevaram) when she went there to relieve the famine. The same phenomenon applied to all great ancient cities, like Babylon (from which city the phrase 'babel of tongues' comes) and Rome, and applies, of course to all modern

metropolitan cities like London, Paris, New York, Bombay, Calcutta, Singapore, etc.

bazaars were full of silks, corals, pearls, gold, gems, sandal, and myrrh, besides 18 different kinds of grain. Washermen, carpenters, black- smiths, sculptors, potters, jewellers, wine-sellers, fishermen, cobblers, tailors and musicians and dealers in salt, mutton, oil, bronze, copper, cork and cloth—all had their separate streets there. Hawkers went about selling paints, bathing powders, cool pastes, flowers, incense and scents.

In the fashionable part of the city, called the Pattinapakkam, separated from the Maruvur- pakkam by a big open space where the daily market was held, were the King's Way, the car street and the nice shops, besides the broad street where the Tamil merchant-princes lived in their lordly mansions, and the streets of the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, landlords, astrologers, physicians workers in precious stones, and famous courtesans, and dancers.

In the middle of the city, at the big cross- roads, stood the *Bhuta-chatukkam* or temple of the *City Daemon*, who was supposed to roar out at midnight his threat, which could be heard for ten miles, to bind with his rope and devour all false ascetics, adulterers, thieves, traitors and perjurers. In sheds
in the open market - place were heaped up thousands of bundles of goods with marks indica-
tive of their weight and value, and the names of the owners. There was no gate or lock or watchman for these sheds but the *City Daemon* was supposed

to have the power of making
and round the place with the

any thief go round
stolen goods on his

head till daybreak when the king's officers would come round, catch him and put him

to death. There were other temples too in the city. One was of *Manivannan*, or Vishnu in his *Anantasayana* posture of mystic sleep on the Universal Serpent in the Sea of Milk.[1] The rest were dedicated to Siva, Indra, *Korravvai* (Goddess of Victory), *Seyon* or Murugan, *Mayon* or Krishna, Balarama, and *Arivan*, the Great knower. There were seven Buddhist Viharas and a Bodhi tree, all of which were reputed to have been erected by Indra.[2] There was also a fine *Silatala*, or Jain temple dedicated to the *Panchaparameshtin*, the five great Jain *yogis*, with the sacred *Asoka* tree, with its golden flowers, standing on a high platform.

In this great city, which excelled even Naga- loka[3] in its delights, and which was famous for its ancient families, there lived a celebrated merchant-prince named Manaikkan.[4] His ships and merchandise were on all the seas. His bounty was as unbounded and spontaneous as that of the cloud. He and his wife, Andal, lived in utmost luxury in one of the big mansions in Pattina- pakkam, on the banks of the Kaveri. For a long time, they had one regret,

that they had no child. But, after a special prayer to *Agni*, the God of Fire, accompanied by much poor feeding and innumerable gifts, they got a beautiful daughter

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1. The Milky Way which looks like a huge serpent.

2. The God of Rain. He is referred to as *Sakka* (*Sakra*) in the discourses of the Buddha.

3. A Hindu paradise.

4. *Maha Nayaka*, or Great Captain.

called Kannaki, of the colour of beaten gold. Even when she was in her twelfth year, she was the talk of the whole town. She was universally acknowledged to be equal to the goddess Lakhmi in beauty and grace, and to the model wife Arundhati[1] in modesty and in domestic virtues.

In Puhar lived also another great merchant-prince called Masathuvan,[2] the owner of innumerable caravans going to every part of the peninsula. He had been raised to the

noblest rank of the hereditary aristocracy by Karikala for his unstinted charity to the poor during a severe famine before the construction of the floodbank and the canals. He had a handsome and accomplished son called Kovalan,[3] who was just about to complete his sixteenth year. Everyone in the town compared the youthful Kovalan to the god Subrahmanya,[4] and many a maiden in the city secretly wished that he would become her husband.

All the match-makers in the town prophesied that Kovalan and Kannaki would be married, and expatiated on the unique excellence of both. Kovalan's friends told him about Kannaki, and said that she was the only girl fit for

him; and
Kannaki's friends told her about Kovalan, and

1. The daughter of Kasyapa, the sister of Narada, and the wife of Vasistha. The star *Alcor* in the constellation 'Great Bear.'

2. *Maha Satva* or man of great riches.

3. The equivalent of the Sanskrit name, 'Gopala' or Krishna.

4. The son of Siva. He is called also *Muruga*, or "The Beautiful".

said that he was the one man in all Puhar fit to wed her. The two thus naturally began to have a great curiosity to see each other. One day, during the Festival of the First Freshes, they had a vision of each other, for a few seconds, through the clever manœuvres of their friends, and in- stantly fell in love, though

they did not speak about it to their parents.

Seeing Kannaki about to complete the age of 14, before which age a Vaisya maiden ought to be married according to the scriptures, her mother, Andal, began to get worried, and even to nurse a secret grievance against Manaikkan who did not appear to be bestirring himself at all about it. So, one evening, when she was asked by him why she was looking depressed, she replied, rather crossly, "What is there for me to be glad about?", and he retorted testily, "You have no sense", meaning that she was not grateful for the many good things vouchsafed to them by the gods. Her grievance against him was increased by this fling in the presence of the servants, and she retired to her own room in anger.

Manaikkan went to the bedroom that night, after his dinner, and waited for her. Not seeing her come for a long time, he sent her maid to her room to fetch her. He had also, curiously enough, been thinking of getting Kannaki's marriage fixed up, and wanted to consult his wife about it.

Andal went to the bedroom, and

asked her husband, "Why have you sent for me?".

"I want to consult you on an important matter," said he. "Come and sit by my side."

"I have no sense. What is the use of consulting me?" asked she.

"Oh, don't be angry. I said that in fun. I want to talk to you about our Kannaki's marriage," said he.

"Kannaki's marriage!" said Andal, nestling to his side. "That is what has been worrying me for so many days."

"Oh, you silly thing!" said Manaikkan, clasping her to his bosom, "Why didn't you tell me? Am I not also worrying over the very same thing all these

days? This evening, when the *Perumkudiars** met to arrange for the forth- coming Guild Dinner, Masathuvan took me aside, and, in the course of casual conversation, gave me a broad hint that he would be glad of an alliance with us. Of course, I gave him no inkling of my opinion in the matter till I had consulted you. His boy, Kovalan, is well spoken of, and seems to be a suitable match for our daughter. Inci- dentally, it will unite the two most ancient families of our town."

"An ideal match, if you ask

me. Settle it at once. Don't lose a moment," said Andal. "In fact, you could have agreed to it without waiting to consult me."

"Oh,
what you

no, how could I agree without knowing thought about it? Besides, in all such

---

* Bigwigs; literally, men of big families or mansions.

Kannaki and tied the *Tali*[1] round her neck in the presence of the King and the leading citizens of Puhar. Lovely maidens sang ravishing songs and distributed flowers and spices. Graceful matrons gave the bridal pair sandal paste, frankincense, perfumes and powders. Young women of golden hue, with fine flowers in their hair, and with

dazzling smiles revealing their lovely teeth, took lamps, vessels and pots of tender shoots, and circled them round the newly wedded pair and

said to the couple:— "May you live a happy and blameless married life, and never know separation from each other, and may your love be ever waxing, never waning !". They then led them to the luxuriously furnished nuptial chamber in the second floor of that lofty mansion, and returned.

Kovalan and Kannaki sat on a gem-legged couch, and took in the beauty of the nuptial chamber which looked as if it

had been constructed by *Maya*[2]. The soft south wind blew through the latticed windows, bringing in the sweet smell

of the lily and the *madavi*, jasmine,

lotus, the *champak*, *kuvalai kodi*, and *kazhunir* flowers in the courtyard and lotus pond below. The couple then went out to the terrace where the bed had been spread. Kovalan wore a garland of jasmine flowers,

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1. A Hindu marriage ornament containing the seal of God (the *linga* or the *saligramam*) on the marriage.

2. The architect of the *Nagas* and *Asuras*, and the person who built the palace of *Indraprastha* for the Pandavas.

and Kannaki a garland of *Kazhunir* flowers. Kovalan took his garland and threw it round Kannaki's neck, saying to her,

" Come, my darling, the moon is shining,
Clasp me firm like a golden creeper,
I'm like the moon for Tara[1] pining,
Plunge me not in misery deeper!
O blossom of the tree,
O ripple of the sea,
With sprig-like arm and star-like eye,
For your embrace
I swoon and sigh !", and folded her in a close embrace. She returned it with warmth

and said:—"The moment I saw you, my beloved, at the festival of the First Freshes, I fell head over ears in love with you. Time stood still for me, and I swore that I would have only you as my lord through all eternity. Great was my anxiety, then, as to how to realise my heart's desire. Now that we are married, and you are holding me close to your heart, great is my joy. O, may we never part for all the lives to come!"

"Amen!" said Kovalan. "Embrace me closer. Like a drunkard's craving for more still

and

more of the foaming wine is my craving for more and more kisses from your lips, kisses sweet as honey and milk mixed in the cup of love! Is the world of the lotus-eyed god [2] sweeter than

the

1. A star considered to be the Moon's sweetheart.
2. Vaikuntha, Vishnu's heaven, an abode of bliss.

tender arms of her that one loveth? All the de- lights of sight, sound and smell are

joined in you, my darling of the shining bangles and tinkling anklets! How can I think of parting from you any more than *Kama*[1] can dream of parting from *Rati*?"[2]

They then lay down on their soft bed, spread with flowers and pollen, under the cool and ex-hilirating rays of the moon. Kovalan amused himself by painting on Kannaki's shoulders and breasts the sugarcane bow of Kama, the god of love, and also the *Kamavalli* creeper. He looked ecstatically at the upraised face of Kannaki, and said:—" Darling, your forehead is like the cres-cent moon on Siva's head; your eye-brows are like Kama's bow; your waist is like Indra's thunderbolt; your eyes are like Subrahmanya's lance. You put to shame the peacock by your complexion, the swan by your gait, and the parrot by the sweetness of your tone. What use are flowers for such lovely tresses, or ornaments for such ravishing limbs? Instead of adding to their beauty, they only take away from it. Why strings of pearls on your divine breasts? If

you want any adornment at all on them, I shall daily paint on them Kama's bow with fragrant sandal paste. O purest gold, O flawless pearl, O delight- ful fragrance, O sugarcane rare, O honey sweet, O beauty overpowering, O nectar life-giving, O noble child of noble family, O gem not got out

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1. The God of Love.

2. His wife.

of the mines, O nectar not got out of the sea, O melody not got out of the *veena*, my own girl of dark-flowing tresses, my own Kannaki, come closer, still closer ! Let us become one in body, mind and soul !" She responded to his call, and he went on prattling to her, "The peacock is ashamed to display its beauty in your presence; the swan dare not strut about when you are near; the *kokil's* * voice is a miserable squeak compared to yours.

O lady of enchanting breasts, beautiful tresses, well-shaped waist, flawless lips and ravish- ing eyes, my own Kannaki, embrace me closer, still closer ! "

Kannaki did so, and the happy pair forgot the moon-light and the sky in their absorption in each other.

* The Indian Nightingale.

CHAPTER II

Clouds on the Horizon

KOVALAN and Kannaki lived in the family house of Masathuvan for several days, in ecstatic love and deep enjoyme nt. Then Kova-lan's mother established the newly married pair in a separate mansion magnificently furnished,

and with plenty of servants and attendants, so that Kannaki might entertain her near and dear ones, ascetics and guests in a befitting fashion. "A newly-married couple," said she, "must have their own separate house to live in, free from interference by elders."

Three years passed, years of ideal happiness and bliss, in which they lived like Kama and Rati, the God and Goddess of Love, enjoying close embraces, like the smoke-coloured serpents[1], and partaking of marital pleasures to the utmost degree, with avidity and zest, as if they realized the instability of life, and these pleasures, on earth[2].

Kannaki, by her exemplary discharge of household duties, earned a name throughout the city as a model wife and ideal hostess, and as the feeder of countless hundreds of poor persons.

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1. *Nagas* and *Naginis,* which are said, in Hindu mythology, to intertwine in ecstatic embrace, in their unions, to the point of swooning. They are often shown in Hindu sculpture in such a posture.

2. A poetic hint about the ephemeral nature of their own mari- tal love, which was to become unstable soon.

CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON

17

Kovalan became equally well-known as a rich and public-spirited merchant-prince and as a great patron of the arts, and especially of song and dance. He was one of the foremost players on the *yal*[1] and the

kuzhal[2] and a competent critic of music. He was also a connoisseur of classical and popular dancing. He used to attend all the famous song and dance recitals in the city.

Chitrapati, a well-known dancing-girl, was the chief exponent of song and dance then in Puhar. Crowded were her performances, even the King and princes attending them. Kovalan was, of course, regular in his attendance. Chitrapati had a beautiful daughter called Madhavi who was a prodigy in singing and dancing. She was considered to be an incarnation of her celebrated ancestress, Madhavi, who was herself the incarnation of the heavenly nymph Urvasi sent down to earth to be born as a dancing-girl owing to a curse of Agastya. At a great dance before Indra, Agastya noticed that Narada was not playing on the *veena* to suit the dance of Urvasi, and that Urvasi was also not dancing correctly owing to her glancing at Indra's son, Jayanta, with amorous eyes. He then uttered a curse, "May Urvasi be

born as a dancing-girl on

1. A kind of Indian lute, an old ancestor of the modern *veena*, the favourite instrument of Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the fine arts. It had no frets. It had 7, 14, 17 or 21 strings.

2. The Indian flute, the favourite instrument of Sri Krishna. Even in those ancient times, it was made of five different materials namely, bamboo, catechu, sandalwood, ebony and bronze, accor- ding to demand.

2

earth, and may Jayanta be born as a male bamboo, and may she, and her descendants on earth, dance with this male bamboo as *Talaikkol*[1] at the Indra Festival in Puhar! Thus, instead of his being a hindrance to her dance, Jayanta will help it, and both these irreverent young things shall render proper homage to Indra. As for Narada's neglect, let the lute lose its unrivalled place among stringed instruments, and fear rivals[2] hereafter!"

Urvasi had been therefore, born as the origi- nal Madhavi in Puhar. When she was 16, she had become unrivalled in song and dance. Just when she was about to make her debut, the Chola King, Todithod Sembiyan, had, at the direction of Agastya, instituted the Indra Festival, in order to ward off droughts and calamities, and to get the services of the *Bhuta-chatukkam* which, on orders from Indra, promptly caught and punished criminals and sinners. The original Madhavi had danced at this first Indra Festival with Jayanta, born as the male bamboo, as her *Talaikkol.* Then both were released from the curse, and returned to Amaravat Indra's city.
But Madhavi's descendants continued to dance at the Indra Festival every year.

Chitrapati's daughter, Madhavi, was not only a girl of rare beauty but also a genius in singing and dancing. Even at the âge of five, her mother

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1. A staff carried by the chief dancer, and serving as a kind of pivot and balancing rod.

2. The violin has now become a serious rival to the *veena*, the sole instrument of Narada who was an expert at it.

had recognized her unique gifts and had engaged for her the best musical instructor in the city. He knew the characteristics of the two schools of music and dancing, the *desi* and the *margi*,[1] and could combine the various dancing poses with the fourteen kinds of the *vilakku* songs, besides being a great composer of songs in chaste Tamil and Sanskrit, of haunting beauty and melody, and a past master of *bhavam*, *ragam* and *thalam*,[2] and an expert on the lute and flute. When Madhavi was fifteen, she had become the greatest exponent of music and dancing in the whole of the Chola country. In dance and song, in grace and form, in voice and pose, there was no one in all that kingdom to equal her. She was equally proficient in both styles of singing

and dancing, and was also well up in the theory of music and dramaturgy.

Kovalan used to see Madhavi's dances and hear her songs on his visits to Chitrapati's house for dance and song recitals. He was carried away by Madhavi's beauty, skill and charm and felt himself regretting that Kannaki knew neither song nor dance. "What a country is ours!", thought he, "where such beautiful arts are supposed to be unfit for the home. How much more charming would Kannaki have been, had she also learnt to dance and sing like Madhavi!"

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1. *Desi* is popular or Tamil; *margi* is classical or Sanskrit.

2. The three essentials of music according to Bharata, the legendary author of Hindu Poetics, Dramaturgy and Dance. His name itself is a combination of the initial letters of these three.

At first his passion for Madhavi was purely artistic. It was so innocent that he even took Madhavi one day to his house, so

that Kannaki too might see and enjoy her dancing and singing. Madhavi's resplendent beauty was only equalled by her inmitable and all-pervasive charm and unrivalled skill in dance. From the very first, she, who had fallen in love with Kovalan at first sight, was bent on capturing Kovalan; and Kovalan's rapturous eyes, fixed on her every movement, showed to poor Kannaki the potential danger to her married happiness.

"It is only an innocent interest in the dance," said she to herself, unconvincingly. "Nobody else has scented any danger in his interest in her. And why should I? Am I to judge my beloved by more uncharitable standards than others?"

Still, the thought kept on recurring till the very dance became to her a physical and mental agony. She heaved a sigh of relief when it was over and Madhavi and Chitrapati had returned

home with the valuable pearl necklace presented by Kovalan.

Alone in their luxuriously furnished nuptial chamber that night, she gave her husband the sandal paste and betel. He took them absent- mindedly.

"What is my lord thinking about?" asked Kannaki.

"Oh, nothing," he said, and embraced her with warmth.

"I wish our dream will come true soon," said Kannaki.

"What dream?" asked he.

Tears glistened in Kannaki's eyes.

"How stupid of me!" said Kovalan. "Don't

weep, darling. You, of course, mean the dream you had about a beautiful baby girl. It all seems so long ago."

"It seems but yesterday to me," said Kannaki sadly. Then she made a supreme effort to get over this jolt in their life's journey, and, embrac- ing Kovalan, said to him, "I have no one except you. You are everything to me, father, mother, brother, husband."

Kovalan returned her embrace and held her face close to his, looked into those clear, innocent, loving, trusting eyes and imprinted a burning kiss on those tear-stained lips.

"You have been weeping," said he. "Why?"

"I was weeping with joy," said she.

"No," said he, "these tears are too saltish for that. Darling, forgive me if I appeared a bit too cold, a bit too much pre-occupied with the evening's dance. It is the fault of this intuitive love of song and dance I have in my blood. Oh, how I wish I had it not!"

"What harm is there in it ? I am not jealous.

You can enjoy her dance and

you like. I only want you to

song as much as

be happy," said

she.

and

"Darling," said he "you are far too generous noble. I shall try to deserve your love." He then embraced her once more with warmth, and her anklets tinkled merrily as he responded. "Beautiful anklets those," said he, "and of inestimable value."

" My mother gave them to me, " said Kannaki. 'They are a gift to my family from the great King Todithod Sembiyan, who had Agastya for his priest, and instituted the Indra Festival. They have got priceless rubies inside. My mother has told me that they are unique in the world, and that there is no other pair like this in existence."

" Did she also tell you that you are the only Kannaki in existence, and that there is no other ?"
asked Kovalan, giving her a long and rapturous kiss. He inwardly resolved to avoid Chitrapati's house thereafter.

For some months, he kept away from Chitra- pati's house, and even avoided passing along the street in which she lived. Kannaki and he lived very happily. Days passed rapidly in each other's company, and Kannaki almost forgot her initial fear. Masathuvan and his wife spent their whole spare time during the day with the young couple. and nicknamed them " love

birds," after the

*Chataka** birds in Hindu legend, They were eagerly awaiting the day when a grandchild would arrive, whom they could take home with them for relieving the tedium of long hours.



* A kind of sparrow.

CHAPTER III
The Storm Bursts

THE storm burst unexpectedly in less than six months. The great Indra Festival was approaching, and Madhavi was to make her debut as a dancer by a dance in the great Hall in the presence of the King himself and was, thereafter, to begin her

career as a dancing-girl by choosing a big man for her first favours. This was the talk of the whole town, of young and old, men and women. All Kovalan's friends were going to see her dance, and a Royal invitation, which amounted almost to a command, arrived for Kovalan also. Left to himself, Kovalan would have avoided it, as he felt that his repressed passion for Madhavi, which he had never been able to extinguish, would break forth again with redoubled vigour. But he was now bound to attend, as his absence would have been widely commented on. Alas, there was also the inward urge to see Madhavi once more and hear her enchanting voice and witness her exquisite dance, and the movements of her flawless limbs. These two conflicting desires fought for mastery in him.

Kannaki was no help at all in this. She was all for Kovalan's attending the dance so that he might have some fun. She believed that he had shaken off his momentary attraction for Madhavi. His ideal behaviour for the last six months had completely destroyed her fears. How could

such

love as his, so complete, so guileless, so trans- parently sincere, go with a lingering affection for a dancing-girl, she thought in her simplicity. Alas, she had not seen beautiful mangoes, with the healthiest skin imaginable and yet harbouring worms! Kovalan too did not, of course, tell her of his unsubdued passion for Madhavi. So he could not frankly ask her advice after telling her all the facts.

In this predicament, Kovalan's mind was literally torn into two and he had no peace. As the Saturday, the full-moon day of the month of *Chithirai*, on which fell the commencing day of the Indra Festival and Madhavi's dance, approa- ched nearer and nearer, he began to experience acute anguish of mind. "My God!" said he to himself, when walking

alone in the park musing, "What a fate is mine! Here is heaven at my feet in the shape of my sweet, loving self-sacrific- ing Kannaki. But, I am hankering after Madhavi. What is there in dance and song that takes away one's senses, and makes one forget one's clear duty? I would fain avoid this dance if I could. But how can I manage it? Darling Kannaki urges me to attend it! I would rather die than cause Kannaki to shed tears. But, alas, I am not master of myself when I watch Madhavi's form and figure, song and dance. I am her slave. Like a drunkard who realises the evil effects of drink on him, in his sober moments, and yet takes it in great quantities when it is within his reach, I too, who realise the danger of this infatuation, will

die for a glance from Madhavi's eyes, or a smile from her lips, if once I go there. Her enchanting figure and her sinuous movements will completely knock me out. What shall I do?"

As he walked along the park distractedly, he found a man about to be speared to death by the king's executioner for having given false evidence in a murder case, and his young wife weeping as if her heart would break. She had also her small baby, and was moaning, "Who will feed my little one after he has gone?". Kovalan had a flash of lunatic intuition. Here was a way out of his difficulty. He went to the executioner and offered to substitute himself for the unfortunate victim. The officer asked him, "What, are you a lunatic?"; but, on closer scrutiny, saw the rich dress and calm face of Kovalan, knew him to be a respectable and sane man, and promptly saluted, and said, "Excuse me, sir, for my unseemly words. I have never heard such an offer before."

"That doesn't matter." said Kovalan. "Will you accept it?"

"Never!" said the officer. "What! Execute a public-spirited citizen of our land in the place of a wretch who has learnt to speak only in order to perjure in the King's Courts! What do you take me for, sir? A lunatic? I have put in twenty years of

unblemished service and won the King's esteem.
Your offer does you credit, but he is my man." Then arose a sharp cry of pain from his
victim, announcing the completion of work.
his deadly

The victim's wife fell in a swoon. Kovalan had her revived. Then he gave her a bag contain- ing a hundred gold coins to keep herself and her babe in comfort. The poor woman burst into fresh tears at this princely act of charity, and said, "You have saved my baby from starvation. May you be blessed with a child who will be goodness incarnate and a solace to the poor! "

The executioner watched all this with wonder, and asked Kovalan, "No reward for me, sir, for doing my duty?".

"None, to-day," said Kovalan.

"I too have a baby, sir, and am none too rich," said the executioner.

"Well, then, take this for the little one," and Kovalan gave him ten gold coins. The man's face displayed the greatest astonishment and pleasure. "The world is not as bad as I thought, sir," said he. "But, of course, you are one of those who will go bodily to heaven. May you be on the lips of men for hundreds of years!"

Then Kovalan left the place and walked on. The Indra festival had begun, with a great round of merriments and attractions. The streets were crowded with sight-seers and merry-makers. Enormous crowds watched the great parade of archers, swordsmen, cavalry, elephantry and chariots. The soldiers were all from the barracks in Maruvurpakkam, and were commanded by generals living in Pattinapakkam. There were Vellalas, Padayachis, Maravas and Vadukas

two kinds of prayers [1] were offered, so that virtue might increase and vice disappear. Then all the musical instruments were sounded. The lute, the flute, the *mridangum*, and the *ghatam* [2] were in perfect harmony with one another, and the auspicious song with its four parts was sung to the accompaniment of the *Desi* dance. Thereafter the *Vaduku* [3] dance began.

In her quick movements, Madhavi looked like a golden creeper animated with life. She spotted out Kovalan as soon as he entered the hall, and fixed her fascinating eyes on him often, causing lightning-like thrills in him. Her dance was scientifically correct, aesthetically superb, and perfect in execution, and held the vast audi- ence spell-bound. The King admired it greatly, and presented her with the customary green leaf garland and one thousand and eight gold coins. Then he departed in state for his palace.

Madhavi went back to her own mansion with Chitrapati and Vasantamala.

Then, as was custom- ary, she handed over a garland to Vasantamala, her hunchback maid-servant, and asked her to stand in the street in front of her palatial home and call out to the rich merchants and landlords and nobles assembled there as follows:—

1. One for positive good, like the prayer, "O lord, give us wealth, give us learning, give us long life and unflinching devotion to you", and the other to ward off evils, like the prayer, "O lord, destroy our enemies!".

2. A mud pot used for keeping time in music.

3. Northern; Sanskritic. The same as *Margi*.

"This garland is for sale for 1008 gold coins. He who buys it will be accepted as the lover of beautiful Madhavi."

Vasantamala asked Madhavi, with a wink, "Do you think Kovalan will fall for it?"

"I am not without hopes," said Madhavi.

"I am sure he will. He is only waiting for the usual proclamation by you, to rush to your side and claim your first favours," said Chitrapati, smiling.

Vasantamala went into the street and made the announcement. Kovalan had watched the dance with breathless interest, and had all his old passion increased a thousand-fold by the glances and smiles directed at him slyly by Mad-
havi. He was swept off his feet and resolved to
be Madhavi's lover, whatever the consequences. The moment he heard Vasantamala's proclamation, he rushed forward and plucked the gar- land from her, crying out, "I accept, I accept."
He was then led swiftly by Vasantamala to the
gorgeously decorated bed-room of Madhavi in
the second floor. Vasantamala left him there, saying, "There she is, the pride of Puhar. It is

the command of the god of Love that you should
enjoy the fruits of love with her to the utmost
on this joyous night in spring. Go to her, and
don't be shy!"

Madhavi was reclining on her soft bed, spread over with flowers, in semi-deshabille. She

wore the flimsiest of silks which showed every line of her figure clearly and to advantage. Her eyes shone with pleasure on seeing the handsome and accomplished Kovalan, the pride of Puhar, come seeking her love. She went to meet him. He garlanded her. She then embraced him with genuine warmth. In the exquisite pleasure of that rapturous embrace, Kovalan felt himself in the seventh heaven of

delight and resolved to be with Madhavi for ever, forgetting his home and faithful wife. The next morning, he did not return home, but took up his residence in a house of his in the Grain Merchants' street. His mind was, thereafter, wholly taken up with Madhavi. Sleeping or waking, eating or drinking, he thought only of her. He neglected his wife, his trade, and his parents, and spent all his time with Madhavi.

CHAPTER IV

The Birth of Manimekalai

THREE months after Kovalan and Madhavi began to live together, Madhavi became pregnant. While both of them were highly excited

and pleased at the prospect of having a baby, Chitrapati was by no means pleased. She thought that it was too early for have a baby.

Madhavi to

"After having a child, her figure will not be quite the same. Her movements will not be so supple. A child is an axe laid at the root of, its mother's youth and beauty," said she to Vasantamala.

"But, what can be done now?" asked Vasantamala. "We can only minimise the evil by looking after her so well during the pregnancy that she has a safe delivery, and emerges out of this ordeal as youthful and vigorous as ever."

"That is so." said Chitrapati. "I

was only speaking from my experience after the birth of Madhavi. I was not the same exquisite dancer again."

"But, the event was responsible for the birth of Madhavi, who is said to have excelled even you. Kausikar was saying that the only kind of immortality, physical, cultural, literary or artistic, that we poor mortals can have, is the immortality

3

extending through the generations, by handing down the torch of life, and that all other ideas are crude and impracticable," said Vasantamala.
as

"That may be so. But, I think he says he himself was responsible for my loss of

this
the

art of exquisite dancing, and I blamed him. must have thought over it and produced

He
this

theory. It is amazing the way the man weaves out theories to suit his particular acts or failings," said Chitrapati. "But, here he is Let us ask him about the proper diet for Madhavi, and other things. He has a lot of old-world wisdom hidden
away in his cranium."

Kausikar entered the house. He was a Brahmin of forty-five, with a cultured look.

His hair was grey, but it was obvious that he was paying maximum attention to his person and appearance. He had just had a good chew of betel, as his red lips showed.

"What, Kausikar, you have had your betel already, without waiting for Chitrapati to give it to you?" teased Vasantamala.

"I am ready for another," said Kausikar. "How is Madhavi?"

"Look at the brute!" said Chitrapati. "He no longer enquires after my health. These men, Vasantamala, cease to worry about us after we reach a certain age."

"Oh, no, I protest," said Kausikar. "I can see that you are all right, as you are right in

front of me. As darling Madhavi is not here, I enquired after her health."

"Don't lie!" said Vasantamala. " How can you see from outside appearance what hidden maladies are troubling us?"

"The face reflects all hidden maladies, like a mirror," replied Kausikar,

"Oh, no there are some maladies which lurk like crocodiles under the waters," said Vasanta- mala.

"Chitrapati has none such," said Kausikar. "Twenty years' experience of regarding that."
her has put me wise

"I knew he would somehow wriggle out of it," said Chitrapati. Then turning to Kausikar, she said,

"Now, I want to consult you on some important things. Madhavi is in the family way." "I thought so," said Kausikar enthusiasti- cally. "Her appearance was changed the last time I saw her. maternal look."

I thought she had a slightly

"Oh, you and your theories!" said Chitrapati.

"Honestly," said Kausikar, "I thought that our Madhavi was in the family way. You don't know the physiological changes that come about during this period."

"We know better than you, for we experience them first-hand, and not, like you, through worm-eaten palm-leaves written by men with second-hand knowledge," said Chitrapati.

"Our knowledge is not really second-hand. The doctor knows more about the disease than the man suffering from it," said Kausikar.

"So, you have the impudence to call pregnancy a disease!" said Chitrapati.

"Oh, no, I only gave an illustration," said Kausikar, "Far from being a disease, it is the most healthy thing on earth. When a pregnant woman looks after herself properly, there is no more danger to her health by confinement than, say, by eating or drinking."

"Now we come to the point. What should she do to keep fit, and to ensure a safe delivery?" asked Chitrapati.

"She should keep her mind free from worry, and drink two glasses of milk and four glasses of fresh water daily."

"Why so much water?" asked Vasantamala.

"For herself and baby," said he.

"Baby! Why, sir, it is only two months since—."

"Yes, but the baby is already as big as my thumb, and is provided with every limb, including toes and fingers."

"What!" exclaimed both the women at once.

"Yes, that is so, and this is one of the things

which you women, who bring forth the babies,
do not know," said Kausikar.

"But, how can such a baby take
asked Vasantamala.
food?"

"God has given it the means to do so. You know the umbilical cord which we cut off after
birth. That connects the baby with its mother, and gives it the best food and air, leaving the mother only the remainder," said Kausikar.

"How wonderful!" exclaimed both.

"The
not begin

greater wonder is that the baby does
to move till the sixth month, and yet
takes its food, air and water regularly from the very time it begins to grow,"

said Kausikar.

"Can you say of what sex it will be?" asked Vasantamala.

"Yes, when it is born!" said Kausikar, at which the others laughed.

"But, some astrologers predict it correctly beforehand," said Vasantamala. " How is this done?"

"By taking a gambling chance in this fifty- fifty business. Once an astrologer put two chits, 'Male,' and 'Female,' on both sides of the lintel, and, after the male baby was born, took out the 'male' chit with gusto bled crowd immensely.

and impressed the assem- Anxious to learn the art,

I approached him for instruction, and he told me about the two-tickets system. I did not practise

it, as most parents want the information at once, and will not wait till the event has come off," said Kausikar.

"Do you think the sex of the baby can be determined at will?" asked Vasantamala.

"Yes, by gods. Man cannot do it."

"What do you think the sex of the child of Madhavi will be?" asked Chitrapati.

"Female, as Madhavi is the stronger character."

"So, you confess that Chitrapati's was the stronger character than yours?" asked Vasantamala.

"What doubt is there? If I were the stronger character, I would never have come here at all, but would have married a second time and lived the life of a house-holder."

"A great compliment to me!" said Chitrapati.

"We are both past the age of compliments," said he. "We can afford to speak the truth."

"Well, continue your discourse about Madhavi's diet," said Chitrapati.

"Let her eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, and abstain from meat and wine," said he.

"You gave the same ascetic advice to me," said Chitrapati.

"And see what a fine baby you brought forth, and how unscathed you emerged out of your confinement!"

"But I was no longer the same dancer."

exquiste

"Oh, yes, you were. Nobody saw the difference, till Madhavi began to dance, and then, by comparison, your dance suffered," said he.

"Any more advice for Madhavi?"

"After the sixth month, let her sleep in your room. Allow Kovalan only to talk to her."

"It will be somewhat difficult, but I shall manage it. Anyhow, this is a new piece of advice; you did not give it in my case."

"It is none the less sound, Doctors may not take some of the bitter pills they prescribe for their patients, but that is not saying that the pills themselves are not good," said he.

"You old fox!" said Chitrapati. "Anything more?"

"Just a little delicate detail for your ears alone," said he. He took her aside, and said, "Do not forget to make Kovalan give away now properties sufficient to maintain both mother and child in luxury for their whole life-time. Cases have been known where the infatuation of a man ceases after a child is born, and he goes hunting after a new maiden."

"I shall do that. Indeed, I have done something already. But you did not forsake me for another woman as you fear that Kovalan may do in the case of Madhavi," said Chitrapati.

"No. But, I had not the infinite resources of Kovalan, and never had any others competing for me."



"You underrate yourself," said Chitrapati.

"This is the first time I hear such an accusation hurled at me," replied Kausikar.

Then, both again joined Vasantamala.

"What does the child inherit from each parent?" asked Vasantamala.

"It gets the skin, the flesh and the blood from its mother, and the bones, sinews and marrow from its father. Madhavi's skin should have shown you that," said Kausikar.

"What about the peculiar cravings during pregnancy?" asked Vasantamala.

"Yes, it is a time when women develop peculiar and whimsical desires and habits. Some eat uncooked rice. Some want rare fruits. Others want their husbands always by their

side. As far as possible, satisfy such cravings, since there is nothing so bad for the mother and child as a frustrated desire," said he.

Madhavi came out just then.

"What are you talking about?" said she.

"We didn't know you were listening," said Kausikar.

"I listened to every bit of it except what you told my mother after taking her aside," said Madhavi.

"Well, then half my problem is solved," said Chitrapati.

"But, is the little being only as big as a thumb, now, and is here, and yet not moving?" asked Madhavi.

"Without a doubt," said Kausikar.

"It is astonishing," said Madhavi.

"Even the great sages found it so astonishing that they have described the God in us as of the size of a thumb, and as not moving in most of us, but still there," said Kausikar.

"Oh, that is the meaning of the famous song about the Great Being of the size, of a thumb?" asked Chitrapati.

"What else?" said Kausikar.

Then he went away on some urgent business
of his, after adjuring Madhavi to abide by instructions, and adding, "After a certain

all his
stage,
my dear, we have to curb our own desires

for the sake of the welfare of our progeny."

Madhavi told Kovalan everything that Kausi- kar had said that day, and especially about the being of no greater size than the thumb, who was growing inside her and levying a tribute of the best food, air and water. Kovalan too was vastly interested in all this. Nothing like this had happened to Kannaki, and the pride of a would-be father swelled in his breast. He resolved to do everything as Kausikar had wanted. Half his talk with Madhavi thereafter was about the being of the size of a thumb inside her.

In the sixth month the baby began to move, and Madhavi showed the separate heart-beat of

the little one to Kovalan, who was never tired of feeling it. "The world is mysterious," said he. "Fancy this little one living there and moving about!" Madhavi used to refer to these movements as the somersaults of Mr. Thumb, and used to take great delight in showing Kovalan those fascinating turns which interested him so hugely that he would keep awake for hours to catch one of them on the move.

As the months passed, Kovalan's pride and excitement ran fever-high. He had watched his baby grow inside the womb from day to day, and was all eagerness for it to arrive in the world of men.

In this period, he signed away documents
conveying more than half his entire properties Madhavi and the expected baby. He was also,

to
in

addition, daily loading every inmate of the household with presents. Many were the ceremonies he got performed in holy places for the safe delivery of Madhavi. Countless were the gifts to the poor and the needy made for the same purpose. He scrupulously adhered to the directions given by Kausikar, even though Madhavi herself protested at their ascetic and stringent nature. "I can never deny myself too much," said he. "Your health and that of the baby are far more important to me than any momentary satisfaction."

At last the labour pains began. Expert mid- wives were called in. The house was filled with

women ready to help.
the room, ready to get

Kovalan sat daily outside
anything required, and

with his nerves highly strung. The labour was prolonged and lasted for full two days. Finally, when the little one arrived, there was only a tiny squeal, just to show that life was not extinct. She had almost been drowned in the bag of waters during the prolonged delivery. Skilled midwives and housewives soon bathed her and made her squeal

aloud. Then they put her on a gold winnowing fan, covered with costly silks, and exhibited her to her delighted father. The babe was most beautiful. The very midwives fell in love with her. The proud parents were hysterical with joy. Kovalan gave away vast quantities of paddy, sugar, plantains and gold coins to Brahmins, relatives, and poor people, in honour of the advent of this new member. He resolved to name the girl 'Manimekalai', as an ancestor of his had been shipwrecked and thrown into the sea, and had been finally saved after two days in the water by the grace of the goddess Manimekalai. "This baby too hovered between life and death for two days," said he, "and was about to be drowned in the bag of waters."

Six days of rapture followed, when Kovalan did not even think of Kannaki for a second. But, on the seventh day, a red spot appeared on the baby's chest, and all were anxious about her life. Kovalan and Madhavi prayed to the goddess

Manimekalai for her life. In the darkness of the night, they heard the goddess say, "You have

named her after me. So, she must be brought up pure and untainted. Take her to Kannaki. If she takes the babe in her arms and kisses it, it will be rid of all danger."

Kovalan was in a fix. Would Kannaki take her rival's baby in her arms and kiss it? But he had implicit confidence in Kannaki's goodness, and, so, sent word to Kannaki if he could send the babe to her.

Visalakshi and Marakadam, Kannaki's lady-in-waiting and nurse, asked Kannaki not to accede to this request, or at least to make it a condition that Kovalan should thereafter leave Madhavi and return to her. Kannaki chided them, and said, "Am I so degraded as to impose conditions for saving a babe, or to get my husband back to me against his

brought to me.

will? No, ask the baby to be
It is half mine, as it is my lord's.
I love to see it, and shall even keep it with me for ever, as a priceless gift from my lord, if allowed."

So, Kovalan sent Manimekalai to Kannaki. Kannaki was enraptured at the sight of the beauteous babe, took it in her arms with over- flowing love, kissed it on both its cheeks, and said to it, " O messenger of God, O holy one untainted by sin, O rare flower of life, my own god-child, may you remain holy and pure all your life!". The babe lay in her arms smiling and happy.

" Can you say that it is not my babe ?" she asked Visalakshi and Marakadam who crowded

round. "It has only my lord's features, and none of her mother's."

"It is a fascinating child," agreed Visalakshi, "though God alone knows what her future will be."

"I too know it," said Kannaki. "This child will grow up pure and noble, and will be a lamp unto the world."

The other two were struck by the air of conviction and finality in her words. Kovalan's man took the baby back. Kannaki told him about her wish to see the baby every day, if possible.

Manimekalai was all right from that day. Madhavi and Chitrapati, who had heard the whole story at Kannaki's house from

Kovalan's man, resolved not to send the babe there again. "If we do so, she will be lost to us. She is a worthy descendant of this glorious family of beautiful dancers," said Chitrapati. "She is sure to win the affections of the Prince when she grows up. If we allow her to associate with Kannaki, she will grow up to be one of those flowers blushing unseen in the myriad homes of the householders."

Kannaki sent for Manimekalai once or twice thereafter, but desisted, on receiving cold refusals. "After all, she is not my babe, and I have no right to ask for her," said she to herself sadly.

" Why did not God deem it fit to bless me with a
child during those three years of my happy
married life? Like a croton in an abandoned

mansion, I am doomed to remain even without a child to console me, in loneliness and misery. What a frail thing is the human heart! How it depends on others, and on things outside, for even its spiritual solace! And, again, how mysterious is life! This connection of my lord with Madhavi was execrated by me. But out of this evil thing has resulted this beauteous babe, like a lotus springing out of mud, and it has stormed my heart at once. How I wish it were mine! But it is the destiny of ill-fated ones, like me, to have evils piled up on one another. Madhavi took away not only my lord, but also his baby! May the baby, however, be happy

all her life, and grow to be a lamp unto the world, as I feel sure she will!"

CHAPTER V
A Desolate Wife

THEREAFTER,

Kannaki's life was one of unrelieved sorrow and growing poverty. Kovalan, the only interest in her life, her god, her lord, her all, was wholly absorbed in Madhavi and Manimekalai, and did not give her even a thought. For some months after the sending of Mani-mekalai, she awaited at least such messages. But they never came. Only messengers for more and more money arrived. She never refused.

Poor Kannaki began to waste away with grief. She could have gone back to her parents, but she refused to do so, and went on living a desolate and lonely life in her

own house with only her maids, Visalakshi and Marakadam, for companions. Thé bloom disappeared from her cheeks, the joy from her face, the spring from her gait. She discarded all her ornaments except the *tali*, the sacred symbol of her marriage. Her anklets were no longer on her charming legs; the gold belt, with its pearl pendants, adorned her waist no more; her earrings were no longer on her ears. She left off all her personal adornments also. No longer did she use sandal paste, powders and collyrium. She did not even observe any of the great festivals, the Indra festival, or the festival of the First Freshes, or the *Vasanta* festival, or the *Panguni Uttiram*, or the *Avini*

Avittam, or the *Thai Poosam* or the *Deepavali*. She did not also entertain ascetics and guests, as her husband was absent from home. She observed all the sacred fasts

religiously, and with great rigour, in a supreme effort to get her husband back by the power of chastity and a pure and holy life, proclaimed by all the sages to be capable of even bringing the rains down in drought. She ceased to smile, and her face was often stained with tears. She did not even put on the auspicious *tilaka* mark on her forehead. Her life was breaking down under the twin heavy loads of love and despair.

One day, when sadly ruminating on her fate, she saw a Buddhist monk, in yellow robes, go past, singing a song whose purport was :—" Sorrow is the first truth of life, says the Blessed One. Don't be deluded, my brethren, by the so-called joys of life. Life, which you prize, is only a long-drawn- out agony.
Its pleasures are fleeting, like the flight of birds; its sorrows are lasting, like the granite rocks. Birth is sorrow, growth is sorrow, youth is sorrow, old age is sorrow, death is sorrow. The babe is born with a cry, the old man departs with a sigh. So,

lay not store by the fleeting pleasures of life, but follow the noble eight-fold path and attain the ever-lasting bliss of *nirvana*." Kannaki bowed her head low, and said to herself, "It is too late for me, a married woman whose only god is her lord, to follow the Blessed One. But, may my child, if I get one, follow this golden advice!"

"My lady, you are bent down with grief," said Visalakshi, to her, one day.

"I try to hide my grief, but the more it is suppressed, the more it gushes out when the hold is relaxed temporarily. One would have thought that it would have been spent out by these months

of constant grief. But, no, like a fountain, it is ever full, however much is taken away from it. To conceal my grief from you is beyond me. But to disclose it even to my lord is unthinkable, and bespeaks a complaining mind unworthy of a true wife. Much less can I dream of telling it to my parents. Besides, why pass on one's sorrow?" said Kannaki.

She never uttered one word of reproach about Kovalan at any time. But, Visalakshi now made bold to reproach Kovalan. "What use are learning, skill in arts, wealth and good looks if a loving heart and consideration for one's near and dear ones do not go along with them? Are they not,

like the beautiful skin and teeth of a tiger, mere death for the innocent ones, like you?" asked she. "How many times have I and Marakadam gone to him, represented to him your forlorn state and implored him to come back! Always, he has turned a deaf ear to our entreaties. Never have I seen such a heartless one!"

Kannaki at once stopped her. "Don't utter a word of reproach about him," said she. "I will not hear it."

"But you are withering away, my lady, because of the injustice done to you by him."

" No, my dear," said Kannaki. " I am

unfortu- nate, and destined not to enjoy the heavenly happiness I had hoped for, owing to my sins in former births. But I do not blame my lord on my own account. Nor has my love for him diminished a jot. Instead, like money invested with a reliable person, it has kept on increasing. Even his living with Madhavi cannot affect his worth. A lotus is as beautiful when clinging to the mud as when taken out of it."

"I see you often grieving for him. If what you say is true, why grieve for him?" asked Visalakshi.

"Because he wastes so much pure love on a courtesan who is only after his money, and will leave him the moment he is sucked dry," said Kanuaki.

"And what a stream of wealth is being drained by her ! " said Visalakshi. "Can you tell me why, even after getting all this wealth and love, such women remain unaffected by the least sentiment of love or gratitude or attachment?"

"Oh, that is easily understandable. A magnet attracts only iron, and not more valuable metals like gold and silver; so, too, a courtesan is only attracted by gold, and not by far more valuable things like love or virtue," said Kannaki.

"How true!" said Visalakshi. "Why not write about this to your lord?"

"As if he will see the truth of it! Caught in her net, he will be as merry as a lord of elephants who has entered a trap but is blissfully eating the sugarcane kept there as bait. No, this infatuation must run its course, and wear itself out, like drunkenness or madness or the long fever."

"But who can say how long it will last?" asked Visalakshi.

"Or, whether it will be over at all," said Kannaki. "It all depends on Fate."

"It will be over in some years," said Marakadam, who had been listening quietly. "Even your wealth, my lady, cannot last very long at the rate at which it is being drained away."

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"Whatever happens, may the gods protect lord from misery of any kind! May he be happy!" said Kannaki.

"You are not even going to the temples or receiving the ladies, your friends, as before. You are living in misery, and yet you bless the author of your misery. I cannot understand it at all," said Marakadam.

"It is easy to understand, Marakadam. All other blessings are nought if the wife lacketh in wifely virtues. What is there in life grander

than a woman who is strong in the strength of

her chastity? It is said that the woman

who

worships no other god but her husband, can even the rain-clouds obey her commands." make

"If that be so, you must be able to make your husband return to you soon," said Maraka-dam.

"I hope that, one day, he will return to me," said Kannaki.

"Nothing will be so sweet to you as a reunion?" said Visalakshi.

"What doubt is there, my dear? Even last

night I lay in his embrace. The cruel morning broke, and showed it to be a hoax. But, still, my heart rejoices even over that dream. There is none so poor as one whose love is unreturned. But, it is utter bankruptcy to lose all hope. So, I live in the hope that one day he will return. Spurned by her, with aching heart, when he comes, I must cheer him up. That is the only reason why I continue to live. He is my beloved one. I love him still with all the love of which my heart is capable. God will surely send him back to me one day."

"So, cheer up, as you have that hope, my lady," said Visalakshi.

"But, that is not my only grief. My lord has not favoured me with a child. Had I at least his image to gaze upon, there would have been some ray of light in my dark life. There is no blessing like that of having a child. The sages say, 'Behold the woman who has begotten a worthy son!

Her place is high in the world of the gods.'

An honourable home is a blessing. But its crowning glory is a worthy offspring. Children are our veritable riches. One living child is equal to all good acts, in the satisfaction it gives. Sweeter than nectar is the plain gruel bespattered by one's own children. The touch of children gives to the body a delight that is divine. The ears are enraptured by their sweet speech. 'The flute is sweet, the lute is sweet,' say they who have not heard the prattle of their own children. But, alas, I got but a passing glimpse of a child, just as I got only a passing vision of my beloved. The only thing that keeps me alive now is the love for my lord."

"Of what use is this love for that unjust one?" asked Visalakshi.

"Say not so. The seat of life is love. Without it life is but a grave-yard. A human being without love is only a mass of bones and flesh

tied up in a bag of skin. Those that love not, live only for themselves. Those that love, their very bones are for the use of others. Say not that love is to be given only to those that return it, or to the righteous ones alone. That will make this divine thing as common as the bazaar goods retailers trade in. Even against the evil-minded ones, love is our only weapon. The person who has plucked out love from the heart can never know peace, joy and prosperity any more than a cocoanut palm whose top has been knocked

away by lighting can put forth leaves, buds and fruits again."

Months passed. A continuous stream of messengers from Kovalan used to arrive regularly for money. Kannaki gave them all that Kovalan ever possessed. When it was exhausted, she gave away the wealth given to her by her own parents. When that too was over, she sold one by one her costly jewels, and gave away the proceeds. Three years after

Manimekalai's birth, she sent away the grieving Visalakshi and Marakadam, in an effort to economise. These two, who adored her, offered to serve her free. But she would have none of it. "Why should I make you suffer?" she asked.

"It is no suffering at all. It is pure joy to be with you. Besides, we have amassed riches during our service here, and it is only fit that we serve without wages for a while," said they.

Kannaki firmly refused this offer, and sent them away. Their request to be allowed to visit her daily was also refused. "I prefer to be alone. I do not want your loving hearts to be afflicted by my sorrow," said Kannaki. "So, please do not call on me till you hear that my lord has come back again." They left in tears. Thereafter, Kannaki lived alone. Clad in old sarees, wearing no jewel except the *tali*, and owning no other jewel except her anklets, she lived in that

house, cooking her own meals, and living on simplest and coarsest of foods, waiting for day when her lord would re-join her.

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Ten more years passed, each year of poignant sorrow dragging on its weary length as if it were seven years in one. Even then Kovalan did not return. Kannaki's grief was increased by hear- ing that he was being treated with disrespect, and even positive contempt, by Chitrapati and the maids. But she was helpless, and could only pray for his honour, prosperity and happiness, since he appeared to be content to put up with every insult so long as Madhavi herself did not join in them. So, she continued to live a desolate life, living in the hope of her lord's return, a hope daily becoming slenderer and slenderer, and now almost at vanishing point.



CHAPTER VI
Chitrapati's Wiles

IN the early years of his living with Madhavi, Kovalan had been extremely lavish in his presents. The stream of gifts of all kinds he sent Madhavi through her maids, Vasantamala and Kamalam, and gave her in person, was unending, like the flow of the Kaveri. Rare silk sarees, the finest pearls, rubies and diamonds, choice fruits and wines, as well as the rarest cots and beds were sent to Madhavi, while Kannaki lived neglected, wearing her old sarees, and praying to the gods for her husband's welfare. Countless were also the gifts, in kind and cash, he made to Chitrapati, Vasantamala, Kamalam, and various other hangers-on of Madhavi.

Madhavi wore different jewels and dresses every day. Her daily toilet was an elaborate affair. She bathed every morning regularly, and washed her black hair, soft as flowers, in the scented oil prepared in the Kerala country, by celebrated physicians, by mixing up ten kinds of astringents, five spices and thirtytwo herbs, till it glistened. She then dried it in the fumes of frankinscence, and did it in five plaits with the thick paste of genuine Himalayan musk. She adorned her feet, which were reddened with henna, with fancy toe-rings on her fair and slender toes. She wore on her ankles solid anklets and chain anklets of various kinds. Her well-rounded thighs had thin

fancy golden chains set with priceless gems. Over her waist was a girdle made of thirty-two strings of flawless pearls, worn over a blue silk saree embroidered with flowers. On her upper arms she had armlets studded with pearls, together with bracelets called "Love's rings" set with precious

stones. Round her wrists were an assortment of bangles, gold bangles, bangles of all the nine gems, diamond wristlets, and bangles of coral and conch. On her tiny fingers, whose nails were reddened with henna, were rings set with the costliest gems. There were necklaces and chains of various kinds on her lovely neck. On her ears were diamond ear-rings with lovely emerald drops. On her head were an exquisite *valampuri* conch inset in gold and with select tiny gems of great value, the snake *nagar*, and various costly ornaments serving as slides and hair-pins. She wore the softest silks, cottons and musk-rat-hair clothes imaginable. She adorned herself with the *mullai*, the jasmine, the *mayilai*, the blue lotus, and the red *kazhunir* flowers, and the most fragrant sandal pastes and scents. Her naturally flamboyant and voluptuous beauty was enhanced a hundred-fold by these arts and decorations. No glamour girl in all the country could equal her in her magnetism and attraction.

In her luxuriously-appointed nuptial chambers and her ravishingly beautiful garden-bower, where were the rarest flowers and singing birds and parrots of the land, she gave Kovalan ecstatic

hours of union and lovers' quarrels.* At regular

intervals, she regaled him and his boon-companions with her exquisite songs, sacred and profane, and with her infinite variety of dances which were the chief attraction for the thousands assembled at the Indra festivals. She displayed to them the *kodukotti* dance, of Siva, the Lord of Time and Destruction, on the cremation ground, with His dread consort, Bharati or Maha Kali, preparatory to the burning down of the three flying fortresses of the Demon Brothers who were the terror of the gods; the *Panduranga* dance of the same deity, figuring as his own consort Kali, before Brahma, the Lord of Creation; the *alliya* dance of Vishnu, the Lord of Preservation, as Krishna, when he saved the world by destroying the demon Kamsa; the *mallu* dance of Vishnu, as Krishna, after he destroyed the demon Bana; the *tudi* dance of Subrahmanya, the Generalissimo of the gods, on the moving waters
after He had destroyed the demon

of the sea,
Surapadma,

the scourge of the gods; the umbrella dance of Subrahmanya when the demons surrendered, and

He

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brought them all under His umbrella, after defeat of Tarakasura, the fiercest demon of

them all; the pot dance of or Vamana, after He had

Vishnu, as Trivikrama conquered the pride of Mahabali and Bana; the *pedi* dance of Kama, the god of love, alternately as a handsome man and a beautiful woman, with its many ravishing poses; the *marakkal* dance of Durga, after her

* *Kalavi* and *pulavi* or *udal*. See the *Kural*.

victory over Mahishasura; the *pavai* dance of Lakshmi, Vishnu's consort, when all the demons surrendered unconditionally

to Durga Mahakali; and the *kadayam* dance of Indrani, the consort of Indra, when entering triumphantly the northern gate of Bana's captured citadel.

Kovalan, for his part, went about the city happily, accompanied by his paid minstrels singing love songs, and by a group of gallants, gaily attired at his expense and skilled in the art of love, each having a beautiful dancing girl as his sweet-heart and endeavouring to keep her love by extravagant love poems. One of these gallants compared his sweet-heart to the moon which had left the sky for fear of the ugly demon Rahu who *was threatening to catch her; another compared his to lightning which had materialised into a dazzlingly beautiful woman who captured all male hearts by blitz; a third compared his to Lakshmi
incarnating herself on earth to try her attractions on men; and a fourth compared his to Yama, the god of death, incarnating himself on earth as his
twin-sister, Yami, in order to deal non-violent death to all men by her looks.

Kovalan and his cavalier friends spent

many a moon-light night eating and drinking and serenading with their sweet-hearts. One of these gallants, drunk with wine, said to Kovalan, at one of these parties:— "The divine moon, who loves his sweet-heart, Tara, far more than he does any of his twenty-seven wives, including Rohini, is our deity, and presides over our sacred love rites.

Like an invading chieftain, conquering the land ruled by a decrepit king with the aid of his own rebellious nobles, the moon invades the realm of matrimony, presided over by the sun, at nights, when the sun becomes weak and powerless, with the aid of the rebel husbands, to the sorrow of the chaste wives who do not know how to hold their husbands by cultivating the art of love, and to the infinite joy of sweet-hearts who specialise in it. But, we, men, have always to watch these sweet-hearts and keep them pleased and clinging to us, for, like the moonlight, they are deceptive. Nor should we read their hearts too closely, for moonlight is,

notoriously, not fit for reading, like sunlight."

At the next Indra festival, Kovalan went with Madhavi, accompanied by her entire retinue and his, to watch it from start to finish. They witnessed the initial offering of boiled grains and sweet sesamum balls, meat and rice, and flowers and incense, and libations of toddy, by Marava maidens in gay attire to the *City Daemon* at the great public square, where the four trunk roads met, accompanied by the lascivious *tunagai* dances, with their hip movements, and the charming *kuravai* dances, and loud prayers for the prosperity of the land and its king, and for freedom from famine, invasion and pestilence. The Chola King, Muchukunda had, by his service to Indra against his demon foes, and by his service to Krishna, by boldly entering the cave of the terrible Kala Yavana and slaying him, got this

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daemon from Indra to guard his capital and to swallow all false ascetics, adulterous wives, intri- guing ministers, seducers of other people's wives, and false tale-bearers wrecking people's lives by their villainous activities.

"Thank God, we are outside the jurisdiction of this terrible *daemon*," said Madhavi to Kovalan. "I am not a married woman, and you are not, therefore, a seducer of another man's wife."

"I wonder how long the *daemon* will keep to this law," remarked one of the rakes accompa- nying Kovalan. "Demons seldom keep any law."

From that place, they went and saw the worship and sacrifices offered to the *Brahmana Bhutam*, *Kshatriya Bhutam*, *Vaisya Bhutam* and *Velala Bhutam*, the guardian deities of the four main castes in

the city. The *Brahmana Bhutam* was white as the moon, and had the Vedas and *kusa* grass in hand; the *Kshatriya Bhutam* was red as the setting sun, and held in its hands a spear and a flag; the *Vaisya Bhutam* was yellow, like gold, and held in its hands a balance; and the *Velala Bhutam* was copper-coloured and held a plough in his hand.

They then went and saw the worship and sacrifice offered to the mysterious statue which never opened its mouth but was said to shed tears whenever the King delivered a wrong judgment, or a Judge

ality.

took a bribe or was guilty of parti-

"A very remarkable statue this," said Kovalan. "It keeps our King from doing wrong by way of punishing the innocent or letting the guilty go free. The Pandya and Chera Kings have not got such

a statue."

"And, yet, if legends speak true, the Chola, Pandya and Chera monarchs are all descended originally from the three brothers who lived in Korkai," said Madhavi.

"Yes, but brothers have different fortunes and qualities," said Kovalan. "Our monarch has got the Tiger Flag, as, like the tiger, he will go straight at his enemy and kill him in one swoop; the Chera monarch has got the Bow Flag, as he believes in attacking his enemies, from a distance, with arrows discharged by bowmen sitting on elephants; and the Pandya monarch has got the Fish Flag to signify the great *Minavatara* at *Kudal Sangam** and to denote that he is a *Minavan* and can go into the bosom of the sea, when in danger, and come back with renewed vigour."

The party then went and witnessed the ablution of Indra's image with 1008 pots of water from the sacred Kaveri, at its confluence with the sea, carried by selected Rajas and nobles, on their heads, in golden pitchers. They then went and saw the

worship offered to Siva, whose origin no one knew, Subrahmanya, His son and the darling deity of the Tamils, Balarama, whose complexion

* Madura.

beat in whiteness that of the conch-shell, and Krishna of the dark-blue colour rivalling that of the sea and the sky. Afterwards, they went to the Buddhist and Jain temples and watched the worship offered there. Then they went to the sacred pool of *Ilanjimanram* by bathing and circumambulating which all blameless hunchbacks and cripples, and deaf, dumb and blind people would be rid of their infirmities for good.

"Why not we ask Vasantamala to bathe here and do circumambulation, and get rid of her hunchback?" asked Madhavi of Kovalan.

"No good," said Kovalan. "She must lead a blameless life before she can get

rid of her infirmity like that."

"Oh, there are catches in all these cures offered by religious men," said one of his followers.

"Remember," said Kovalan, "the heavens cannot be secured by the weak or the wicked. He who wants good things must pay the price."

They then went to the sacred stone pillar, *nedumkalninramanram*, by circumambulating which people were said to get rid of madness due to administration of *dhatura* and other drugs unconsciously by others, from possession by devils, and from snake poison.

Then they went to the grand special pavilion erected for the occasion and heard the chants of the Vedas and the offering of burnt oblations by reverend Brahmins of saintly appearance. After-

wards, they witnessed the grand car festival when the images of Indra, Siva, Subrahmanya, Balarama, and Krishna were taken in gaily-decorated chariots attended by *Vasus*, *Adityas*, *Rudras*, *Maruts*, *Apsaras*, *Nagas*, *Siddhas*, *Gandharvas*, *Vidyadharas*, *Paisachas*, *Tarakas*, *Bhogabhumiyas*, *Kinnaras*, *Kimpurushas*, *Senas*, *Asuras*, *Bhutas*, *Munis*, *Devas*, *Garudas*, *Rakshasas*, *Yakshas*, *Charanas* and other celestial beings, amidst the deafening roar of drums, flutes and harps, and the devotional cries of the vast assembled multitude in which the shrill voices of women and children predominated.

From the tenth year onwards, the presents ceased to flow so quickly. But, whenever he went empty-handed, he would find the door of Madhavi's room closed, and Chitrapati or Kamalam standing outside and telling him of Madhavi's anxiety as to the new saree or jewel she would be requiring for the next day's dance; and he would invariably return to his residence in the Grain-Merchants' street, buy the necessary thing and return with it, and present it to an enraptured Madhavi. "Why could you not have mentioned it to me yesterday?" he used to ask Madhavi, after making the present, and she would reply, "How could I? I love you, and hate to mix up business with love," and he would glow with

happiness, and she would embrace him with ardour calling him, "lord," and "husband," and chide herself for it, saying, "Only the wedded wife, Kannaki, has the right to call you so."

He

you are

would reply, "You more than she, for the lady of my heart, and the mother of my child. She is but a faded memory."

But, after twelve years, his resources were exhausted. All his hoarded wealth was gone, and there was not a man who would lend him a pie or sell him anything on credit. So, he could not give any presents at all. To his horror, he found Chitrapati and Kamalam show visible signs of lack of respect, and even contempt. He thought that he saw even in Madhavi signs of coolness, during the Indra festival that year when he had to go to her with empty hands.

Chitrapati had been for some time urging on Madhavi to abandon Kovalan, who had become a pauper, and to take on, instead, some rich mer-

chant or nobleman. "A pearl necklace leaves the pauper to cling to the neck of some other. So too, a beautiful courtesan," said she.

"See what he has given us!" said Madhavi. "All our wealth is his. What had we before he came? And, I love him. So does Manimekalai. I can't leave him."

"He is not even honest with you," said Chitrapati. "I hear that he has hidden away enormous sums with friends, and even with Kannaki. He is not so simple as he looks. Besides, he is dead against dedicating Manimekalai to our ancestral profession. Unless we get rid of him, we can't succeed in doing that. And fancy what

will happen if we don't do that! The race of

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Chitrapati and Madhavi extinct! The Royal Dancing Girl's family gone ! "

"Mother, I cannot and will not abandon Kovalan. If I do so, I shall die of grief," said Madhavi.

"You won't, my dear," said Chitrapati. "Even a family woman, like Kannaki, has not died of grief by such separation. Try to do without him for a week, and you will be able to do without him for your whole life-time."

"If I try honestly for a week and fail, will you allow me to take him back and keep him for ever, even though he has not a pie ?" asked Madhavi, as a simple expedient to escape from her pesterings, and also in order to test the strength of Kovalan's attachment to her. Once, in sleep, she had

heard him mutter:—

"I had a wife beauteous as a star, she loved me with all her heart, and I too loved her. In those days, my love was without fear", and had not quite liked it.

"Oh yes," said Chitrapati. "But, of course, you must take some other lover for that week."

"Certainly not," said Madhavi, "Even ani- mals have an interval of time between dropping their old partners and taking on new ones."

"We dancing-girls have not," said Chitra- pati.

"That shows how degraded we have said Madhavi.

become,"

"This is almost the language which

little Manimekalai uses," said Chitrapati.

"What wonder! She is my daughter," said Madhavi.

"You were prepared to take on the highest bidder before you took on Kovalan," said her mother.

"I knew that he would be the highest bidder," said Madhavi. "Even otherwise, one can be excused for being content with a lamp before the sun rises, but not after."

"Well, well, we shall not argue over it," said Chitrapati. "After all, it is only an interval of a week. Even to get a suitable new lover for you will take that much time. And it is always better to keep the field clear before the crop is decided on. So, you get rid of Kovalan from the last day of the 'Indra Festival' which comes off the day after to-morrow."

"But, how, mother?" asked Madhavi. "I would rather die than ask him to leave because he has become a pauper, or because you have heard rumours that he has hidden some of his wealth. Loaded

with his presents, how can I say that?"

"It is easy to get rid of him," said Chitrapati.

"I know the sort of man he is—vain, conceited, fancying that you love him for his virtues and qualities and not for his money!"

"But I do love him for his own qualities," said Madhavi.

"What qualities?" asked Chitrapati, "Abandoning his virtuous wife, or leaving off his prosperous trade, or allowing his ability to rust by merely cultivating light follies suitable for a gigolo?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Madhavi. "I was responsible for taking him away from Kannaki and keeping him from his trade."

"A dozen persons like you could not have done it if he were not so worthless. Try your charms on Manaikkan or Masathuvan, and see. I have tried it in my time, my dear, and failed. Bricks can break clods but not granite blocks," said Chitrapati.

"Well, your plan will at least enable Kovalan to do his duty by Kannaki and his ancestral trade for a week. So, I gladly agree to it," said Madhavi snappishly. "Now suggest your device for making him leave me in anger."

Before you go out with Kovalan, Kamalam will sing that famous song, 'The Dancing-Girl's Farewell to her pauper lover,' beginning

with,

"Begone, thou pauper, show not thy face,
Know you not the motto of our race?
Our heart is always sold
For thrice its weight in gold!",

and he will disappear at double trot, if I have read him aright, as many such have done before."

"Mother, you are mistaken. He will put up even with this insult, for my sake," said Madhavi.

"Never. He will depart even as a dog does when it sees a stone being picked up by a man for throwing at it."

"We shall see," said Madhavi.

"Well, if he does not go even after

hearing that song, you sing to him, on the seashore, that song about the foreign lover who left his sweetheart at twilight in his chariot and with a solemn promise to return, but failed to return. One thing you should promise. You must sing that song in your most convincing tone, as a realistic actress, and pretend to be that abandoned sweet-heart, and must show real pining for the absent lover."

"Right Ho!" said Madhavi, tickled by this piece of forthcoming stage-acting. "I shall do it the more feelingly as there is no such fellow in my life in reality. It will be great fun to tease Kovalan. A week's separation cannot kill him."

The last day of the 'Indra Festival' that year began with a glorious morning. The whole town was full of merry crowds dressed in their best, dancing and singing and cracking jokes, and enjoying the many pageants, tableaux, proces- sions and juggleries in the streets. Kovalan

woke up that day with an aching heart, as he had nothing left to present Madhavi with, though it was the day for making costly presents. Still,

his love was so great, and his trust in her love for him so implicit, that he went to her house, as usual, in the after-noon, to take her to the sea-

front where the crowds would gather to bathe and make merry.

Kamalam accosted him at the gate, asking him, "What rare presents have you brought for Madhavi and Manimekalai to-day?" He passed her, shame-faced, and met Chitrapati who asked him, "On this day of universal presents, have you come empty-handed to escort the most beautiful woman of our city to the greatest festival of our country?" Humiliated by this rebuke, he went to Madhavi, who had not even dressed. "Madhavi," said he, "forgive me. I have not brought the usual *saree* for the day." Coolly she received this confession, and

asked him to wait for her in the hall till she had dressed and was ready. All over her room were , scattered dresses and ornaments gifted by others. Not one of the innumerable dresses and ornaments gifted by him during the long years of his courtship was there. Nor had he been asked before to sit in the hall while she dressed. He had always sat in her room while she dressed. All these were Chitrapati's manoeuvres, though he did not know this.

He waited sadly in the hall. He felt himself humiliated, insulted, outraged and despised. His mind wandered back over the years of ardent welcome, gushing love, and rapturous kisses.
He said to himself, "Truly have the poets said, 'Only the wealthy man is of noble birth, is deemed virtuous, pious, eloquent and handsome. Everything depends on wealth.' Fool that I am,
that I did not realise this truth before!"

•

As he sat there, Kamalam went in and remarked, "You have forgotten to put on your festive robes and jewels, sir. Surely, you can't escort our lady in those clothes?" He swallowed this insult too, and said lightly, "Madhavi does not mind it. She values me for my own sake, and not for the sake of my clothes." Kamalam retorted, "Does she?", and laughed, adding fuel to the fire of anguish burning in his heart. Chitrapati went there just then, and said to Kamalam, "Why don't you lessen the tedium of the wait by singing a song?" Kamalam then sang in a full clear voice, 'The Dancing-Girl's Farewell to her pauper lover.' Kovalan felt the words bite into him. Chitrapati and Kamalam saw his discomfiture, and Kamalam laughed and asked him, "Now, is that not a funny old song?"

"A bit too realistic, perhaps," said Chitrapati, "but quite interesting and instructive."

Just then, the door of Madhavi's room opened, and his tormentors left him.

CHAPTER VII

Sunset on the Seashore

MADHAVI came out of her room at last in all her resplendent glory. She had bathed her fragrant black hair, soft as silk, till it shone like silk itself. She had tied it up in plaits, and had scented it with real musk. She wore the finest silk *saree* and bodice found in the south country. She had pearl necklaces and gold chains round her neck, a diamond nose-ring, bracelets and bangles of gold, coral and conch on her arms, costly rings, set with blood-red rubies, on her fingers, diamond ear-rings on her ears, a gold waist-belt adorned with pearls round her waist, and gold anklets and toe-rings. Kovalan saw, to his chagrin, that she was not wearing a single jewel he had gifted her. Deliberately she had put on dresses and ornaments gifted by others. He bent down his head in shame

and pain. "Let us go to the seashore as has been our custom on this last day of the 'Indra Festival.' and sit in the private pavilion in the park engaged by me already, and watch the fun and spend the evening in singing till the moon rises. You know it is full moon day," said Madhavi. "A pity it is so dark, cloudy and cheerless so early in the evening!"

Kovalan mounted his mule. Madhavi got into her chariot accompained by Vasantamala and Kamalam. The chariot proceeded seawards, followed by Kovalan on the mule, and by his com-

panions on foot. They passed through the bazaar decorated with arches and towers across the street, and with plantain trees in fruit at the entrance to every big shop. They then went along the central highway to the sea-front, which presented a most animated scene. Flags of different kinds

were flying there over huge mounds of goods stacked in different places. These flags seemed to say, "Here, on these stretches of white sand, can be seen the various kinds of goods brought in ships by foreign merchants who have left their native homes and settled down here, and are living with the inhabitants of this country in terms of mutual esteem and friend-ship." Heaps of pepper, cloves, cardamom and nutmegs from Kadaram,[1] corals from the western seas, sandalwood from the Malabar hills, gold and silver coins from far-off lands across the sea,[2] pearls from Korkai, sapphires from Ceylon, the products of the Gangetic valley from the port of Tamralipti, frankincense and resin from Arabia and Abyssinia, rock-salt, asafoetida, dried figs and raisins from the Punjab and the Gandhara country, through Bharukachha and Surat, were all there. There were brilliant lights illuminating

the whole place and making the sea-shore, with its aloe hedges, as attractive as the cultivated fields by the side of the great irrigation tanks with their ridges full of lotuses. Ships lay at anchor, a mile from the shore, filled with the

1. *Sumatra.*

2. Rome. Pliny mentions that every year a million pounds worth of gold was taken away from Rome to India.

myriad articles of plains, forests, mountains, deserts and seas. The ships from *Savakanadu* and the eastern archipelago were manned and captained by Tamils, and those from the west by foreigners. Beacon lights were burning on the shore to guide the ships on the sea. The lights which used to burn all night long in the tall mansions of the foreign merchants had already been lighted. So were the lights in the giant ware-houses. The lights from the countless boats of fisherman plying between the shore and the ships added picturesqueness to the scene.

They passed on to the bathing ghat. There was a huge concourse of people there in multi-coloured robes and speaking a babel of tongues. They were in several groups. In one group were the princes and nobles with their ladies and retinues. In another were the merchant princes with their managers and clerks and servants and women-folk. The common folk grouped themselves according to their villages and habitations.

There were innumerable booths selling camphor, betel, sandal-paste, cocoanuts, turmeric, saffron, vermilion, and scents, sweets and savouries, cakes and country bread, gold and silver jewels, and bangles of various kinds, each booth having its own light. Fancy articles were sold by pretty young girls in artistic pavilions. Jugglers and dancers held their performances in separate enclosures.

An immense crowd of men and women of all four castes was rushing to bathe in the narrow

place where the great Kaveri met the sea, and especially in two pools in it known as the *Somakundam*[1] and the *Suryakundam*.[2] The bath in these sacred pools was much sought after as it was said to have the effect of keeping lovers for ever devoted to each other and of preventing separation even for a day. Kovalan longed to bathe in these ponds so as to ensure that he would
not be separated from Madhavi. But, Madhavi turned down the idea, declaring that it was unthinkable to bathe in such a crowd, and took
him instead, to the private pavilion in the park facing the sea, to spend the evening in singing.

In the midst of that tumult, beautiful Madhavi, whose limbs were soft as flowers, went with Kovalan to her special enclosure and sat on
a white-legged couch with a canopy of picturesque paintings, and surrounded by a screen set on the newly-spread sands in the shade of a *punnai* tree standing in a plot

enclosed by screw-pine trees whose flowers kept away, by their scent, the foul smell of the fish emanating from the sea.

After sitting down comfortably, Madhavi took out her exquisite lute and tuned it. She tested with her delicate ears the eight tunes and
the twenty-two octaves, and sang some songs. Then she gave the lute to Kovalan, and said, "Do sing some songs. It is not a command, but a humble request."

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1. Pool of the Moon.

2. Pool of the Sun.

Kovalan took the lute and sang an Ode to the Kaveri, to the great delight of Madhavi. "Hail to thee, O Kaveri," sang he. "Pride of our realm and King! Like a faithful wife, you do not sulk though our Lord has

wedded the Ganges in the north and *Kanyakumari*[1] in the south, and extended the sway of his white umbrella and sceptre to the Himalayas and the sea.[2] In the course of your bridal march to the sea, O Kaveri, you listen to the songs of the plough- men, to the roar of your own mighty falls, the resonance of the thousand sluices, the songs of cuckoos, and the noise of the crowds celebrating your festivals." Then, he asked her to sing. She sang a song to the sea as follows:—"How can we know, O God of the sea, the hearts of those lovers who approach us on this beach from behind with presents in their hands, for us, simple maidens of Puhar, who build their sand-castles? When we grow angry at their solicitations and pluck flowers from our garlands and throw them at the sea, these strangers take these for signs of love returned, and pursue us, saying that they are suffering from a disease which is incurable except by our embrace. They say that we caused their disease and ought to cure them of it. They cry out, 'This open seashore with its foaming waves and

shining sand, this moon shining on this moon-like face, this breeze disturbing these

1. Cape Comorin.

2. This refers to King Karikala's expedition to North India and Cape Comorin.

lovely tresses, the rise and fall of these divine breasts, have all conspired to make us sick. You spread the net and caught us, and made us sick. Do not then refuse the cure due to us. Do not kill us with the cruel darts from your eyes. Use those darts as lancets for curing our wounds."

Then, she sang an ode to the Kaveri which ran, "Hail to thee, O Kaveri, you glide along care-free, confident in your

lord's keeping on to his correct path as a King, and render everlasting service to this land as a mother does to her babe by giving your never-failing waters, as she does her breast-milk." Then she sang another ode to the sea, "O God of the Sea, they come to us with pearls to exchange them for our coral lips. They beguile us with promises of marriage, give us bogus rings of gold, ply us with wine, and words more intoxicating than wine, and then, taking their toll of us, depart, never to return. My lover, who met me, at this very place on this seashore in ecstasy, and pledged his eternal love to me, he has gone, abandoning me. But, though he has forgotten me, I shall not forget him. O leaves of the tree under which we met, are you so heartless that you waft in the wind as gaily as ever ?

What shall I do, O sea? You do not know my woes. O waves, you have destroyed even the ruts made by his chariot-wheel, and have tried to drown his memory, you who pretended to be my friend!

O swan, sporting with thy mate, go and tell my lover that his deed is not just. The even-

ing darkness has spread everywhere. The sun has

gone down from the horizon. The maddening twilight has come, the monster which has swal- lowed the sun but has not yet ejected the moon! Is this maddening twilight, which stabs the heart, found in the country of the deserter? Even the birds have stopped singing, and the waves have stopped roaring. But I shall not forget him who forgot and deserted me. It is in such cruel maddening twilight that my lover departed, for- getting his vow to bide with me for ever. O god of the sea, forgive his false vow, remember me to him, and restore him to me soon."

Kovalan heard this song, and thought to himself, "I sang without any hidden meaning. But she, the cunning one, has sung this song with her mind on some lover whom she still holds dear and wants to take on, dropping me. Now it is clear that

she too, and not only Chitrapati and Kamalam and Vasantamala, has got tired of me owing to my present poverty. I have outstayed my welcome. Let me depart at least now, while the last shreds of self-respect are still left." He slowly withdrew his arm, which was enfolding her, and said to her, "Since the day has come to a close, we shall make a move," and rose abruptly. Madhavi did not show any sign of getting up. So he departed quickly from the place with his gallants.

When he had gone out of view, Madhavi also got up. She got into her carriage with a sad heart, along with her maids, and returned home without her lover.



CHAPTER VIII

Forgiveness Divine

SAD at heart, sick of life, repenting his folly in leaving his virtuous wife for the sake of a dancing-girl, Kovalan left the pleasure-park

and went into the city. On the way, he saw the temple of Siva, the guardian deity of the city, open, and the lights burning, and the worship going on. He entered and worshipped the Lord, uttering a hymn —

Poor and unfortunate am I,
Grief-stricken, with many a sigh,
I know neither hymn nor prayer
Nor story nor invocation rare.
I come, O Siva, like a child,
Which has gone astray and run wild,
Returning to its mother dear,
Repentant and devoid of fear.
Pondering on objects of sense, there sprang
Attraction; from attraction grew desire;
Desire flamed to fierce passion; passion bred
Recklessness; then, the memory, all betrayed,
Let noble purpose go, and sapped the mind,
Till purpose, mind and man were all undone.

Earth, heaven, ah me! I see no earth and heaven;
Thee, Lord of Lords, I see,
Thee only, only Thee!
Now, let Thy mercy unto me be given!
With body bent and reverent intent,

I praise and serve and seek Thee asking grace,
As father to a son, as friend to friend,
As one who loveth to his lover, turn Thy face
In gentleness on me!
Think not ill of me, Soul of Souls,
My head is burning with hot coals!

By a stroke of Fate I became
A slave of senses full of blame!
O, save me, save me, Lord of Lords,
I seek refuge in Thee, God of Gods!

He was greatly relieved after this. It seemed to him that the eyes of the idol looked at him with infinite pity and love. A peace descended on his troubled mind. He sat down in the temple-hall listening to a bard who was reciting select verses from the *Kural*[1] of the Sage Tiruvalluvar.[2]

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1. A most remarkable Tamil book dating from the second century A. D. It treats of *Aram* (*Dharma* or Righteousness). *Porul* (*Artha* or Wealth) and *Inbam* (*Kama* or Love), and is unique for its terseness and nobility of thought.

2. One of the greatest of Tamil writers, and, indeed, of writers of all time. Supposed, by tradition, to have been the son of Adi, an Adi-Dravida lady, by a Brahmin called Bhagavan, Adi herself being the daughter of another Adi-Dravida lady by a Brahmin. Recently, Sri M. Raghava Ayyangar has suggested that the tradition is wrong, and that 'Tiruvalluvar' is only the honorific "Sri Vallabha" of some great Tamil Prince or noble who was also, perhaps, the prime minister of a Tamil Kingdom. This theory is supported by the extensive inside knowledge of politics and high society exhibited in the *Kural*, and by the purity and nobility of his Tamil which it would be idle to expect from an Adi-Dravida of those days. Tiruvalluvar's accurate knowledge of Sanskrit, marriage with a Vellala lady of Kaveripakkam, and high religious and philosophical ideas are further reasons in support of this theory. I have no doubt that he was also a prime minister of a State, like Chanakya who wrote the "*Arthasastra*," which too shows an equally keen 'inside knowledge."

"The false embrace of a woman who sells herself for money is like holding in one's arms a corpse in a dark room," recited the bard.

"How true!" said Kovalan, and sobbed.

"Who doth herself protect, who doth cherish and nourish him who took her to wife, who keeps her word with glorious fame, who idles never, she is the wife," went on the bard.

"Ah, such a one is Kannaki," muttered Kovalan to himself.

"Double-dealing damsels, drink and dice are befriended only by those who have been cast away by the Goddess of Prosperity," recited the bard.

"I am one such. Woe unto me!" said Kovalan to himself.

"A mess of pottage, though as insipid as plain water, if earned by one's own exertion, is sweeter than" nectar, went on the bard.

"Oh, how foolish I was to have left off my trade and depended on my father's wealth!" said Kovalan to himself.

"The straight and beautiful arrow is murderous, and crooked is the sweet lute!" said the bard.

"An apt description of Madhavi and Kannaki as they appeared to me," said Kovalan.

"If a man be poor, every one despises

him. If a man be rich, everyone does honour
recited the bard.
unto him,"
6

"That has been my fate!" exclaimed
Kovalan,
half audibly.

"An unpropitious fate is a reproach to nobody. Not to put forth human effort, knowing what is wise, is truly a reproach," went on the bard.

Kovalan resolved to put forth an
effort, but
despaired as to what he could do.

"What lacks he whose wife is
worthy, and
what, indeed, has he whose wife
unworthy is?"
went on the bard.

"My wife is perfect. So I lack
nothing,"

exclaimed Kovalan to himself, "Will Kannaki forgive me?" he wondered. "How can I beg of her to forgive me?"

"Begging is just like giving when it is of those who have not known refusing even in dreams," went on the bard.

That made Kovalan resolve to go back to Kannaki, after first going to his residence in the Grain Merchants' bazaar and taking his spare clothes.

He rose and went out of the temple to his temporary residence. There he found Vasantamala waiting for him with a message from Madhavi painted with a paste of red-lac and *agar* on a long, broad and soft

screw-pine flower forming the outside covering of a garland of jasmine, champak, *madhavi* and other flowers.

It ran:—

"Spring is a youthful King apt to commit errors. It is he who brings lovers together at

eventide under the auspices of the Moon who too is not flawless. What wonder, then, if lovers commit some error in their folly? They are killed by the sharp darts of the Moon whose rays, cool when they were with their mates, become red-hot and insufferable when separated from them. Please understand this."

Madhavi had gone from the beach to her summer house in the garden. Sitting on the soft downy bed in her room upstairs,

she had applied sandal paste and saffron to her body, to cool the excitement and had tried to play on her lute, to forget the sad incident, but all in vain. So, she had taken up the garland and written this message on it, and had asked Vasantamala to give Kovalan the message and take him at once to her.

Kovalan read the message, when Vasanta-mala held it up for him to read, but refused to receive it, saying, "She knows the eight kinds of dances and poses to perfection, the *Kankooduvari*, performed with love glances from melting eyes which appear to be more real than those of a love-lorn maiden; the *Kanvari*, with the bewitching smiles which attract even stones; the *Ulvari*, performed with the gait of a swan, the dance of a peacock and the lisping words of a parrot; the *Puravari*, with ravishing hip movements which make the spectators possessed with a passion to embrace her; the *Kilavari*, with captivating bust movements where men are overcome by the beauty of her breasts and tresses ; the

Terccivari,

showing to perfection the pangs of separation even when I, her lover, was with her; the *Katcivari*, when she wore a garland with buzzing bees sitting on it and spoke of her sufferings in convincing words to the audience; and the *Eduttukolvari*, when she fell in a love-swoon on one person after another chosen by her, and they, of course, restored her in turn to her senses and comforted her. All these dances, my dear, are quite natural to Madhavi, the cunning one, because she is after all only a dancing-girl."

Vasantamala went back to Madhavi, who was waiting for Kovalan, and told her this. "It is only a love quarrel as before. If he does not come this night, we shall see him at least to-morrow morning," said Madhavi lightly to her, and sent her away. But, after that, she lay down with a heavy heart

on her soft bed, spread with sweetsmelling flowers, sad and sleepless.

That same evening, Devandi, the priestess of Sasta* temple outside the city, called on her friend

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* Harihara-putra, the son of Siva and Vishnu. Vishnu was then in the incarnation of Mohini, the Cosmic Enchantress. Sasta or Sattan is a peculiarly Southern God, not much worshipped in the North. But, in South India, he has a strong hold, even now, on Hindus. He is supposed to be pleased at the happiness of all, and the common forms of worship to him are *sasthapriti*, or extensive and sumptuous feeding, and *panakapoojai*, or extensive distri- bution of jaggery water to one and all, after a series of devotional songs during which one of the devotees becomes possessed by Sasta. There is a celebrated ancient shrine of his at *Sabarimalai*, in the hilly regions of Travancore, which is visited by thousands of pilgrims in the season every year,

Kannaki. Her history was curious. There had been a Brahmin lady called Malati, of the *Kapi gotra*, whose child had died at birth but who was treating her co-wife's son as her own. One day, when feeding it at her breast, the child choked, hiccoughed and died. Panic-stricken by this, afraid that she would be held guilty of carelessness in handling her co-wife's child, though she loved it as her own, the distracted Malati ran with the dead child to the temples of the Sun and the Moon, of the Kalpaka tree, Airavata, Balarama, Siva, Muruga, Indra, and Satavahana, and to the Jain temple, and besought the deities to restore the dead child to life and relieve her from her great distress. None of them did so. Then she went to the heretic temple of Sasta. There a beautiful woman appeared before her, said to her, "No god will grant a boon to one like you who has done no penance; give the corpse to me," and snatched the body from her and took it to *Chakra- valakkottam*, the cremation ground, followed by the agonised Malati. In that

cremation ground, the goblin, Dakini, took the child's corpse and devoured it. Malati uttered heart-rending cries. Then Sasta, moved by her sorrow, appeard before her and said, "Do not weep, O fair lady. Behold your child alive again!" and disappeared, and took the form of the child. Malati snatched it up joyfully and took it back and handed to its mother who saw no change at all

it over in her baby. This divine child grew up and married Devandi. He lived with her for some time, and, then, told her the secret, and disappeared into

the idol in the Sasta temple, asking her to worship it assiduously thereafter, giving out that her

husband had gone on a long pilgrimage to Benares and other places.

Devandi did so. She was attracted by Kannaki about whom she used to remark to herself, "I am a woman wedded to a god. She is a goddess wedded to a man." She was deeply grieved to hear of Kannaki's distress. On that last day of the 'Indra Festival,' she offered special worship to Sasta, and went with the consecrated offerings to Kannaki, and said to her, "May your husband be restored to you!" Kannaki replied, "Even if I get him back, I don't know what would happen. My heart misgives me. I had a terrible dream, O Devandi. He and I went hand- in-hand to a great city. Some people there foisted a most unjust crime on him. It stung me like a scorpion-bite. I went and protested to the King. The King and the City then suffered a great calamity. Then he and I—don't laugh—achieved un-hoped-for bliss."

"My dear," said Devandi, "You

have not been finally discarded by your husband. He will surely come back. All this suffering of yours is due to your failure to perform a vow in a former birth. If you bathe in the *Suryakundam* and *Somakundam*, which are situated where the Kaveri meets the sea, you will be for ever united to your husband and will also attain heaven. We shall go and bathe there. Come!"

"No. That will not be proper. My husband is my only god, and I can pray to no other, or be obliged to any other for such a gift," said Kannaki. Devandi left, smiling and full of wonder and joy.

Soon afterwards, when Kannaki was sitting inside her house, thinking sadly about Kovalan and her dream, she heard a knock at her door, and, on opening it, saw Kovalan. On seeing him, the very picture of sorrow, she fell at his feet, and burst into

tears. Seeing her wasted form, a veritable shadow of her former self, clad in the poorest of *sarees*, Kovalan's heart smote him, and he too burst into tears. Clasping her to his bosom, he said, "By consorting with a woman who makes every false thing appear like truth, I have lost all my ancestral wealth, and even yours, and am now drinking the dregs of humili- ation." Comforting him with a fascinating smile, Kannaki said, "Do not grieve. Accept these priceless anklets. Sell them, and, once more, you will have enough riches to make you respected." Kovalan rested his face on her shoulders, and sobbed like a child, and said "Oh, darling, I did not mean that. I have left her and my past for good. Why is woman's heart bought with vain and empty treasure?"

"Say not that woman's heart is bought with vain and empty treasure," said Kannaki. "That applies only to dancing girls and women of pleasure. When a

woman's bosom knows Love's flame, it never wanders like a bee from flower to flower. Deep in her heart the passion glows, the

love that warmed her will never leave her bosom, and she loves and loves for ever. Come, pull yourself up. You are with me now. I shall soon heal your wounds."

"Dearest, I seek refuge in you and you alone, my Kannaki, forgiving like Mother Earth, and generous like the tree which gives its shade to the man who cuts it down," said Kovalan.

For long they remained locked in each other's arms, sobbing against each other's bosom. Then, at last, Kovalan said, "The door is open. Shall I close it?"

"Don't," said Kannaki. "Let the whole world see our re-united joy.

Now we can begin again gathering the threads of our lives where they were left off."

"Not here," said Kovalan. "I can't remain for even a day here in this town where I have been insulted and dishonoured and made to feel the indignity of being a pauper. I want to go to distant Madura where nobody knows me or my dishonour, and resume my trade and earn a good sum and come back. The only problem is that of capital. Somehow, I shall scrape it up."

"Why worry about it? I have these two priceless anklets. You can easily raise a large sum by selling them," said Kannaki.

"I do not like to sell your remaining jewels. I want to depend on my own resources," said Kovalan.

" What!" said Kannaki. " Have you come back to me, and been re-united to me, only in order to taunt me with having things separate from you ?," and wept again.

" Don't weep. I shall do as you desire," said Kovalan, kissing off her tears. " Now, you must grant me leave to go to Madura. I shall be back in a year."

" I shall not live apart from you for a moment hereafter," said Kannaki. " I am also coming with you."

" But, darling, you are not accustomed to walk; and the way is long, and lies through hills, rivers, forests and jungles full of thorns and wild beasts, and wilder men."

" You need not dilate on the dangers and troubles ahead. Whatever they are, I am coming with you," said Kannaki. " This is the land of Sita and Savitri, not of Madhavi and Chitrapati, and wives here will follow their husbands in weal and woe till the Sun, the Divine Witness of Truth, burns himself out."

"Then, let us set out to-night, after the moon has set and before the sun rises," said Kovalan, "before anybody knows about it."

CHAPTER IX

Southward Ho!

IN the dark last watch of the night, on Tuesday, the last day of the Indra festival, after the moon had set, and before the break of dawn, when the evil star *Kettai*, betokening death to any male who started on any journey at that hour, was reigning in the heavens, Kovalan and Kannaki set out for Madura, driven by their fate. They passed out of the tall outer gate of the town with its spring latch and the carved figures of the goat, yak and swan on the door. Then they passed the temple of Vishnu as Narayana sleeping his *yoganidra* on his

serpent couch[1] on the ever-moving waters of the Milky Sea.[2] They circum-ambulated the temple. They then went past the seven Buddhist *Viharas* and the lofty *Bodhi* tree with its five branches, folding their palms in silent prayer and supplication. Later on, they passed the Jain temple with its *Asoka* tree, where Jain preachers used to deliver sermons to the public on festive days under the direct inspira-tion of the *Panchaparameshtins*,[3] worshiping silently likewise. Then they passed the entrance-gate of the city with its moat and the outer wall.

1. The Milky way, which looks like a giant serpent across the sky.
stretching

2. The galactic universe.

3. Five kinds of Jain *yogis*, the *arhats*, the *siddhas*, the *acharyas*, the *upadhyayas*, and the *sadhus*.

with its enclosed lake and groves and

gardens, with all kinds of flowers, and the royal park.

Proceeding further, they crossed the broad road, with shady trees on both sides, leading to the bathing ghat on the Kaveri. They followed the northern floodbanks of the river westwards for a league, and entered Kavundipalli, situated in a grove of flowering trees where the Jain saint Kavundi resided.

Kannaki, who was unaccustomed to walk, and was fatigued and foot-sore, asked Kovalan, in a lisping, half-ashamed whisper, "How far is Madura?" Kovalan replied, "It is quite near."

Both of them went and saluted the saint. Kavundi looked at them closely, and said, "You appear to me to be of noble lineage and high principles, unaccustomed to walking long dis- tances, and to have, like high-souled Jains, taken to this journey as a kind of penance. Why have you left your home and come so far? What is the reason for the settled sorrow on your

faces? Why have you begun this weary journey?"

Kovalan replied, "There is nothing much to say. I have lost my wealth, and want to go to the ancient city of Madura to re-make my fortune."

"The tender feet of this beautiful girl may not stand the sharp and rough gravel on the way. But, what is the use of my saying all that when neither you nor she will listen, and you are already on the move? I too am anxious to visit

the holy city of Madura to worship Arivan[1] and to hear the *dharma*[2] preached by the great Jain saints there and get rid of all

adharma.[3] Let us go together," said Kavundi.

"With pleasure. I too shall then be relieved of my anxiety about this girl" said Kovalan.

"Well the way is long and weary, we shall have some difficulty in choosing the exact routes also," said Kavundi. "If we choose the shady path, lying through the forests and the jack, gin- ger and turmeric plantations, for the sake of this tender lady, who cannot stand the scorching sun, we shall have to avoid the pits and snares laid by the hunters to catch wild beasts and risk ripe jack fruits falling down on our heads. If we decide to go along the other route, across fields and lowlands, this lady will be frightened by the crabs and water-snakes. She may slip on weeds plucked out and heaped on the ridges of fields. She may also, in places, tread on worms and other helpless creatures, and crush out their lives. But there is no third path. We can only take steps to avoid these evils."

So saying, she took up her begging

bowl and
net-bag and
bundle of peacock feathers, prayed to
the *Arhats*, *Siddas*, *Acharyas*,
Upadhyayas and
Sadhus, the five classes of holy Jains, and
set out
with Kovalan and Kannaki.

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1. The Perfect Being of the Jains.
2. Rules of Righteous conduct.
3. Unrighteousness.

They proceeded along the

floodbanks of the Kaveri. "This sacred river rises in the Brahma-giri hill in Coorg, the land of the thunderbolt and raging storms, and rushes to meet her lord, the sea, filled with the waters brought to her by the clouds," said Kavundi to them. "Here, it leaps across the bund with tremendous noise reminiscent of the Sivasamudram falls where it jumps down from the mountains. This bund makes irrigation possible by direct flow, instead of

by water-lift, baling bucket, picottah and palmyrah basket, as elsewhere."

As they proceeded past the gigantic bund along the river bank, they noticed various kinds of irrigation, by direct flow from the canals, by bucket, by water-lift, by picottah, and by palmleaf basket. They saw an endless series of paddy fields and plantain and sugarcane gardens irri- gated with the never-failing waters of the Kaveri harnessed by the dam with the sluices constructed by Karikala. They found large numbers of water-fowl, noisy cranes, red-footed swans, green- footed herons, wild fowl, black herons, king-fishers, crabs, fishes, water-snakes, quails and parrots. Wallowing in the miry and unploughed fields, black buffaloes came out with their unwashed hair and red eyes and rubbed their itching backs against the ricks of grain heaped up in the fields, making the ears of paddy, by such rude shaking, jut out from the sheaves, like yak-tail whisks. They found brawny-armed labourers and peasants engaged in cultivation

operations.

They did not travel more than a league a day. After several days' journey, they reached Sri-rangam where the Kaveri was hidden by the city.

"In this holy place is the original shrine of Sri Ranganatha in His *Anantasayana* posture," said Kovalan to Kannaki, and he and Kannaki bowed low, in reverence, and passed on. When they were passing across a grove of *kadamba* trees, sacred to the gods, a Jain *charana*[1] alighted there in the course of his flight across the aerial regions. All of them fell at his feet, and Kavundi cried out, "May all our past sins perish!" The saint ascertained from them where they were going. With his knowledge of the past, present and future, he knew the fate in store for Kovalan and Kannaki at Madura, but, being a sage, who had conquered all attachment and anger, and had cultivated perfect indifference to joys and sorrows, he did not warn them, or ask them to desist from their journey, but simply said, "O

Kavundi, inexorable are the laws of *Karma.*[2] The good and bad effects of one's acts can never be wiped out by another's advice or effort. They shoot forth like sprouts from seeds sown. Bad deeds produce bad *Karma*, and good deeds good *Karma*, just as a margosa seed will produce a margosa[3] tree, and an Asoka seed an Asoka[4]

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1. A sage.

2. A Hindu doctrine which holds that actions in previous births determine events in this birth.

3. A tree with bitter leaves, flowers and fruits.

4. A tree with beautiful red flowers.

tree, No one can escape from the effects of his *prarabdha* Karma. Life is easily extinguished, like an open lamp in a high wind. So, get a firm knowledge of the one God, with his eight- fold attributes, of Infinite Knowledge, Infinite Vision, Infinite Courage, Infinite Bliss, Namelessness,

Clanlessness, Agelessness and Deathlessness. Kavundi, He is All-Knowing, All-See- ing, All-Daring, All-Bliss. He has no name or form, caste or clan, infancy or old age, birth or death. Know him in His Reality, and do good deeds all your life, and escape from the prison of the body."

"I shall never
prostrate myself except to
God Arivan.* Nor shall I join
together to reverence any one

my two hands
other than an
expounder of Truth. My head will not suffer any flower to be placed on it except the flower-like feet of Him who walked upon flowers," said Kavundi.

The sage said to her, "May you be soon freed from the bond of births and deaths!" and went away.

Kavundi and her two companions crossed the Kaveri in a boat and went to the southern shore, and saw the beautiful temple

and the wonderful garden dallied

surrounding it. Kovalan and Kannaki among the sweet flowers, and looked like Kama and Rati. A rake, going along with a woman he had picked up just then, saw them,

* Arivan: the God of Perfect Intelligence.

and asked Kavundi sarcastically, "Are they Kamadeva and Rati?"

Kavundi said, "They are not gods. They are human beings. They are my children. Don't go near them. They are tired after a long journey."

Resenting the implied rebuke in her words, the ribald pair said, "O holy one, deeply learned in the *sastras*, have you ever before heard of the children of the same person becoming husband and wife?"

Kannaki heard this piece of ribaldry, and closed her ears. Kavundi

cursed the ribald pair to become old jackals, and to roam about in the adjoining thorny jungle. The rake and his sweetheart instantly became jackals and howled piteously.

Kovalan and Kannaki heard the howls and said to Kavundi, "Should not faults like theirs be attributed to ignorance, and forgiven, Oh holy one? When will these two be released from this curse?"

"Every bad act will get its punishment. They will be released from the curse after roaming about for twelve months in the forest belt outside the fortress wall of Uraiyur which we are approa-ching," said Kavundi. "The Chola King holds his court at Kaverippumpattinam, while his viceroys hold their courts at Uraiyur and Kanchi. The Pandyan King holds his court at Madura, while his viceroys hold their courts at Korkai and Suchindram. The Chera King holds his

court at Vanjikkaruvur, while his viceroys hold their courts at Karuvur near Uraiyur, and Kollam."

"Is this place not also called Varanam?" asked Kovalan.

"Yes. Do you know why this ancient city is called Varanam?" asked Kavundi.

"No," said Kovalan and Kannaki. "Tell us."

"An aggrieved bird killed its oppressor, an elephant, here," said the saint.

"Tell us the story," said Kovalan and Kannaki.

"I shall," said Kavundi. "A sparrow couple lived on a big tree in this place, which was a forest before. The female had just laid her eggs. The next day, an elephant went that way and took refuge in the shade of that tree from the burning heat of the midday sun. In sheer wantonness, and despite the remonstrances of the sparrow couple, the elephant caught hold of the branch where the sparrow's nest was, and severed it from the tree. All the

sparrow's eggs were thrown down and shattered to pieces. The parent sparrows escaped. The mother sparrow bewailed the loss of her eggs most bitterly. The sparrows consulted their friends, a wood-pecker, a bee and a frog; and the five pitched on a plan to kill the elephant for its callous destruction of the eggs. The bee hovered about the elephant's eyes. Fearing a stinging in the eye, the elephant closed its eyes. The wood-pecker then pecked

out one of its eyes. The elephant ran along in pain, closing its other eye also. The wood-pecker then pecked out the other eye too. The blind and maddened elephant ran about anxious to plunge into a pond and wash its aching and burning eyes. When it was walking on a terrible precipice, with a yawning abyss below, the frog croaked from below. The elephant took the familiar sound to mean the existence of a pond in that direction, blindly rushed thither, fell over the precipice, and was crushed to death. This place where the unjust elephant was killed by the bird it had

wronged, was called *Varanam*, and was chosen by the great Chola King, the descendant of Sibi, as his capital, to show his readiness to put down the oppression of the meanest by the strongest."

Kovalan was impressed by this story. He narrated to Kavundi his own sad story. At the end, Kavundi said:

"The mind that gives itself up to the control of the senses sees its helm of wisdom rent away, and, like a ship caught in a whirlwind, rushes to destruction."

To his question as to what should be the goal of life, she replied:—

"To worship the holy feet of Him of the perfect intelligence. Whoever takes refuge in the sacred feet of Him whose walk is among flowers, his days will be many upon the earth. The ills of life do not touch him who clings to the feet of Him who is beyond preference and beyond

aversion. He is the Origin of everything as A is the first among letters. He who sings earnestly the praises of the Lord, the bonds of birth and death fall away from him. He who, with His grace, burns away the desires of the five senses, his days will be many upon the earth. They alone escape from sorrow who take refuge in the feet of Him who has no equal. The stormy seas of wealth and sense delights cannot be crossed except by those who cling to the feet of the Ocean of Righteousness. Worthless is the head that does not bow at the feet of Him who is endowed with the eight attributes. They alone cross the ocean of births and deaths who take refuge in the feet of the Lord. His feet are the goal of life, my children," said Kavundi. " Wor- ship the Lord with yearning. You will soon see how your woes fall away from you, leaving you fresh as dew."

"Will good prevail always against evil?" asked Kannaki.

"Yes, but not all at once. The sun prevails at last over the cloud; the moon gets over the eclipse: and woman gets over the pangs of child- birth. Evil and thunder are loud, but they cannot finally prevail. God is good, and He will crush evil at last. Take it from me, in God's world,

No heart that holds one right desire
Treadeth the foad of loss."



CHAPTER X

Arrival at Madura

Kavundi sat under the Asoka tree in the Jain temple in Kandapalli outside Uraiyur and worshipped God as *Arivan*, the All-knowing, who was represented as standing in unbroken serenity under three umbrellas, one

over the other, symbolic of the three veils of the body, mind and ego which have to be pierced before reaching Him. She then told all the sages of Kandapalli the words of advice given to her by the *charana*. After spending that day there, she and Kovalan and Kannaki left for Madura before daybreak. At sunrise, they reached a *mantapam*[1] situated in the midst of a grove of young trees and adjoining a tank. They met a Brahmin there, and enquired about the Pandya country. He praised the Pandyan King, Nedun Jeliyan, saying, "Long live the *Tennavan*[2] who has won renown by conquering the lands up to the Ganges and the Himalayas and is known as

Aryapadai-kadanda[3] Nedun Jeliyan, the conqueror of the Aryans. Wearing his garland of morgosa leaves and flowers, he has made the Fish Flag respected

1. A stone structure, used generally for religious purposes.

2. Lord of the South. He is also called *Minavan,* or "Lord of the Fish."

3. He was known as *Aryapadaikadanda* Nedun Jeliyan, in commemoration of some unidentified victory over the Aryan princes of North India.

 from the Himalayas to the sea. His adviser is no less than the sage Agastya who lives in the Podiyil Hills.[1] He is a worthy descendant of the famous Kings of this line, of Ugra Pandya who threw his

spear and arrested the onrushing sea which was invading his land and had swallowed up the *Pahruli* river [2] and was threatening *Kanya Kumari* which place he saved, and who broke the bracelet of Indra, and forced the rains down, and saved his land from drought. The garland of Indra sits well on him.

"He is a glory to the Lunar race. His justice
is stern, and law-breakers have fled the country.
His kingdom is prosperous, and the harvests are unfailing."

"May I know which is your native place,
and what brought you here, sir?" asked Kovalan.

"I am a native of Mankadu in the Kuda-
malai [3] Hills. I have been on a pilgrimage to
holy Tirupati where Lord Venkateswara resides
on the highest peak listening to the

music of numerous waterfalls, like *Akasaganga* and *Papanasam*; Rameswaram, where the Lord, as Vishnu,

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1. Agastyakootam, in Travancore and Tinnevelly. It is also called *Chandanachala*, or Sandalwood hills. It is near modern Courtallam, of the famous Falls.

2. A mythical river said to have been swallowed up by the Indian ocean when there was a huge tidal wave encroaching on that region.

3. A portion of the Western Ghats, in the present Anamalai region, in Coimbatore District.

set up the great *lingam* of Siva; Kumari,[1] where the three oceans meet, and the sun worships the Goddess, as the Maiden, morning and evening; Madura, where the God and Goddess both reside, and look after

humanity like doting parents; and Srirangam, where the Lord sleeps the Sleep of Eternal Awareness on the Cosmic Serpent in the Sea of Milk. I am now returning after seeing that wonderful image of Vishnu reposing on the couch of the thousand-headed serpent in the temple in *Turuthi*,[2] jutting out of the widening waves of the Kaveri. After seeing the righteous rule of Nedun Jeliyan, I have extended my stay here, blessing this great monarch."

Kovalan then asked him, "O noble Brahmin, please tell us the shortest route to Madura." The Brahmin replied. "There are three routes to Madura, the holy city which has been aptly named 'the city of eternal sweetness' because of Lord Siva who turned the terrible poison emitted by the dread serpent, Vasuki, which was about to kill all men, into sweet nectar by swallowing it. Siva cursed also the giant elephant, subsequently sent out by the demons to kill the people of Madura, to become petrified and remain as *Anamalai* hill outside the city. The branching of the routes begins only after you have crossed the hills

and jungles you see from here stretching up to the horizon. These hills and jungles will normally be green with verdure, but are now

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1. Cape Comorin.

2. Srirangam.

parched up owing to the fierce heat of the advanc- ing summer. You will now have to cross many bald hills and empty tanks. Then you will reach Kodumbalur by the side of a big tank called Nedunkulam. There the road branches off into three separate routes, right, left and middle, all going to Madura.

"The route to the right passes by *Kadamba* groves, dried-up *Omai* trees, *Vahai* trees, withered bamboo groves, *Maral* trees and waterless jungles where thirsty deer wander about for water, and forest spirits take on delusive forms to trap men. These spirits can be made to resume their real forms only by reciting powerful

hymns to Durga or Sakti or Siva or Vishnu. In that land also wander about the fierce Eiyanars or Maravas who, unable to take to the plough, owing to lack of rains in their country, take to the bow instead, and live by cattle-lifting, burglary and highway-robbery. If you escape from their clutches, you will reach the celebrated *Sirumalai* hills of the Pandyan country, covered with wild rice, plantains, turmeric, sugar-cane, millets, garlic, saffron, arecas, cocoanuts, mangoes and jack trees. Keep those hills on your right, and walk on, and you will reach Madura.

"If you take the route to the left, you will pass through low-lying fields with wild flowers. Then you will come to a desert country with winged beetles and stray *babul* trees. After crossing the desert, you will reach the famous *Tirumalkunram*, or *Alagar Koil*, with the temple

of Lord Vishnu, with the lofty eagle standard, half way up the hill. Three miles from the holy shrine is the *Silambaru*, or the

Nupuraganga, cutting its way through the hill. At the sacred *kongu* tree, you will meet a nymph, fair as a golden creeper, and dazzling as lightning, and with tresses like dark rain-bearing clouds and bracelets on her shoulders. She will ask all devotees who go there and bathe in the sacred waters of the *Nupuruganga*, 'What makes for happiness in this birth?',[1] 'What makes for happiness after death?',[2] and 'What makes for eternal happiness, and puts an end to births and deaths?.'[3] If they give the correct answers, namely, 'Wealth', 'Good Deeds', and 'Salvation', she will soon open the door of a wonderful cave situated on the side of the hill. The favoured devotees will find several passages in it, and will finally come to a gate-way with double doors. There, another nymph, the twin-sister of the first one, will meet them, and ask them, 'What are the three paths to salvation?'. If they give the right answer, namely, the paths of works, knowledge or devo- tion, as the case may be, she will show them the three sacred pools called *Saravanam*, *Bhavakarani*

1. Wealth, or *Artha*. "A decent subsistence is needed for self-respect and happiness in this life" says a Tamil proverb.

2. Good deeds. "Nothing follows you beyond the grave except your good deeds," says a Tamil maxim.

3. "Moksha, or salvation." This is defined as unity with the Lord, and, so, the end of all births and deaths, and becoming birth- less and deathless, like the Lord Himself.

ARRIVAL AT MADURA

107. and *Ishtasiddhi.*[1]

Bathing in them, uttering the holy *mantras*, *Om Namasivaya,*[2] and *Om Namo-narayanaya,*[3] with equal faith and reverence, the devotees will gain a thorough knowledge of *Aindra Vyakaranam*, by bathing in *Saravanam*, and know everything needed for worldly success and prosperity; they will know all the deeds of their past births, which led to their present birth, by bathing thus in the *Bhavakarani*; they will

gain all their worldly desires by bathing in the *Ishtasiddhi*. Even if you do not want to bathe in the sacred pools, do not fail to worship the Lord in the temple and get His grace. I must go now. I am going to worship the feet of the Lord[4] who measured the whole Universe with His three steps."

Kavundi said to him, "O Brahmin versed in the four Vedas and engaged in doing good, we have no wish to go to the cave named by you, or to bathe in those ponds, or to repeat the prayers mentioned by you. Is there anything that cannot be gained by those who lead a life of

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1. The paths of works, knowledge and devotion are recognized in all systems of Hindu philosophy as leading to salvation, the emphasis alone differing in the different systems. Some systems,

like the Gita, combine all the three.

2. I bow to Siva.

3. I bow to Narayana.

4. Vishnu, as Trivikrama or Vamana, did this. This is referred to in the Vedas themselves. The Earth, the mid air, and the sky were covered with one step each of the Lord, when Mahabali, universal emperor, proudly offered Him as much space as He could cover with three steps, as requested by Him.

truth and non-violence? Go your way worshipping the feet of your gods, and we shall go our own way."

"Do as you like," replied the Brahmin. "There is a limit to what mere man-made truth and non-violence can achieve. None can escape his Fate except with the Grace of the Lord of the Universe."

Kavundi and her companions resumed their journey. At noon, Kavundi and Kannaki became weary and thirsty, and rested under a tree by the road-side. Kovalan went by a foot-path to a tank, some half a mile away, to take them some water, and to slake his own thirst. The forest deity saw him and was smitten with passion for him. She wanted to excite his love at least by deception and pity. She assumed the form of Vasantamala, and going to him, fell at his feet, and said, "Madhavi is bitter with grief and is accusing me of having uttered a lie to you about her which made you utter harsh words against her and desert her. She fainted and cried out 'A courtesan's is the worst of all professions, as the pious and the learned shun her like a dreadful disease, and anything will be believed about her.' She wept and snapped her pearl necklace, and scattered the pearls about in her anger and chagrin. Driven out by her, and hearing from some men who came there from this direction that you were on your way to Madura, I have come here with a caravan after

suffering great hardships. I solicit your love and sympathy, O

gracious one." Kovalan remembered the warning of the Brahmin, suspected this woman to be some spirit putting on Vasantamala's appearance, uttered a Vedic *mantra* to Sakti or Sankari, riding on the stag, praying to Her to make the spirit reveal its identity and leave him. At once the forest deity resumed her real shape, begged his pardon for trying to deceive him, requested him not to tell his wife or Kavundi about the deceit, and disappeared.

Kovalan slaked his thirst, and took water in a lotus-leaf-cup for Kavundi and Kannaki. The sun was very hot. Kannaki's feet were also blistered and she was too fatigued to proceed with the journey. So, they entered a grove containing the shrine of Aiyai Kumari or Kali,[1] the dreadful deity of the Maravas,[2] who used to pray and sacrifice to her and then go on their

merciless plundering expeditions. They went into the shrine and rested there awhile.

When it became dark, there was a sacred dance there.
A girl represented the Goddess Kali. She belonged to the priestly sub-sect from which every year a man would sacrifice himself in front of the Goddess as a terrible offering to ensure prosperity for the tribe in its plundering raids. She was dressed in a tiger-skin, and was mounted on a stag with twisted horns. She carried a bow made of heart-wood.
Her hair was done up in a matted knot, and was ornamented with a boar's

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1. Parvati.

2. A tribe of robbers.

tusk and a small silver crescent moon. Her *tali* was a necklace of tiger's teeth. She stood there in the middle of the worshippers, a living incarnation of the terrible Goddess,

while a dancer, Salini, danced as if possessed by the Goddess, and spoke out her inspired words. A crowd of Marava men and women assembled with all kinds of offerings. Salini cried out in anger, "The herds of the towns round about are increasing while your stables are empty, O Maravas! The Maravas are becoming meek and peaceful like the lawabiding citizens of the degenerate towns, and no longer rob the wayfarers. This great race of bow-men has degenerated into a timid tribe of coolies! If you want to live care-free, eating mutton chops and drinking the glorious, foaming plam-wine, give your Goddess her dues, in blood and your plundering expeditions will succeed. Else, she will not send victory to your bows, ye, who live by plunder!"

At Salini's words, a dozen Maravas stepped forward and gashed their foreheads with their swords, and offered the dripping blood to the Goddess. Then Salini said to them, "Your Goddess is pleased at this exhibition of your devo- tion.

Success will befall you in your next raid, a month hence. The iron hand of the great Pandyan, Nedun Joliyan, will relax, and you will profit immensely." Then, she said, pointing to the surprised and horrified Kannaki, "Here stands the peerless gem of a woman who will become the idol of the entire Tamil country!"

Kannaki smiled ironically, and whispered to her husband, "What an absurd statement!"

Finally, the dance ended, after much drinking and singing and cutting of goats and fowl, and prayers to Sakti, Siva and Krishna for the prosperity of the Marava tribe.

When the dance was over, it was past mid- night. Kovalan went and suggested to Kavundi that they should travel during the night, to save Kannaki the exhausting marches in the scorching sun, pointing out that, under the just Pandyan, robbers dare not infest the roads. "Here the king holds the rod of punishment high, and even

the wild beasts are held in control. The bear will not attack the ant-hill; the tiger is at peace ' with the deer; even the ever-greedy crocodile behaves itself," said he. Kavundi agreed, and Kovalan went and told Kannaki, "Darling, we shall hereafter march during the nights. The tiger will cross our path, the owl will screech, the bear will roar, but have no fear." Then he began the march with her arm resting on his shoulders.

The next morning, they reached a village inhabited by Brahmins who had fallen away from the ancient Vedic life, and had taken to music and dancing. Kovalan kept his wife and Kavundi in the house of the headman and went for mor- ning ablutions, thinking of the various experiences of his life. On the way, Kausikar, who had been sent by Madhavi in search of Kovalan, met him and said:—"Oh, I have found you at last. Your father and mother are desolate with grief. Your

relatives too are plunged in sorrow. Your father's men have gone in different directions in search of you. Puhar has gone mad, like Ayodhya of old after the departure of the great Rama. Madhavi, on learning the news from Vasantamala, fell into a prolonged swoon. I went to console her. She said to me, 'I prostrate myself at thy feet. Oh, see that I suffer no more from this separation.' She wrote out a message and gave it to me saying, 'Please give this sealed palmleaf to him who is the apple of my eye.' I have wandered all over the south country and have at last found you. Manimekalai also sends an oral message, through me, as follows :—'Father, come back, I want you. You were like a god unto me. It is not meet that you should desert me for something my mother did. Even she meant nothing. Come back. Let us all live together— my mother, Kannaki, yourself, and me." Kovalan shed tears and asked, "Is she all right?" "Yes," said Kausikar, "but heart-broken. Even Madhavi is disconsolate. I have not seen any virtuous wife so shaken by separation from her husband, or

any child so heart-broken as Manimekalai. Here is Madhavi's letter."

He handed over the message. Memories of Madhavi rushed on Kovalan. With trembling heart, he opened the palm-leaf and read, "Lord of my life, I prostrate myself at thy feet. Forgive the senseless words I spoke in jest, simply to test you, words which, ah me, made you leave your parents and town and go wandering with your

noble wife all over hill and dale. Everybody blames me for this.' Cruel were the words I said.

Cruelly come they back to me today. 'You are too light and fickle,' you thought, and went away.

But, may

really, my darling, love may come, and love

go, and fly like a bird from tree to tree, but I will love no more till you come back to me. Bitterly I weep all day, bitterly from all pleasures turn away. Had we never loved so blindly, never met or never parted, I would not have been so broken-hearted. With heart-wrung tears, I implore you to come back to me. Come back, come back to us, and bless us."

Kovalan exclaimed, "Verily, she was not in the wrong!". He said to Kausikar, "Go and give
this palm-leaf to my
not find fault with

parents so that they may
Madhavi, and may also be

relieved about their fears regarding me
beloved Kannaki. I do not like to come

and my
back to
Puhar as a pauper. I want to rehabilitate myself as a merchant at Madura, and then return. Go and tell this to Madhavi and Manimekalai. Tell Manimekalai that it is my desire that she should grow up a virtuous young maiden!"

Kausikar went back to Kaveripattinam. Kovalan returned to Kannaki and Kavundi. He found the Brahmins dancing Durga's Dance of Destruction, and singing suitable songs. He, too, took up the *Veena* * and sang some songs about Durga, astonishing those professionals by his great skill and knowledge.

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* The Indian lute.

8

Then the three resumed their journey to Madura. At last, on Thursday, the last day of *Ani*,[1] they heard the thundering sounds of the drums in the Siva and Meenakshi temples at Madura and in the great palace. They heard too the chanting of the Vedas, and the loud instruction in the schools. The cries of elephants, the neighing of horses, the rumbling of

chariots and the tramp of the foot-soldiers also reverberated in the air. The great city was waking up, and the noise began to swell, like the roar of the sea. The Vaigai, with its flowing channel and river-bed gardens, was very attractive. Kovalan cried out, "Oh, this is no stream of water, but is a stream of flowers."

The three crossed the river by one of the less busy ferries, and went to a fragrant grove full of flowers, avoiding the busy ferries with the crowded boats having the figures of the elephant, lion, horse and other animals. They bowed to the City Spirit and the distant temples.

Then they
crossed the belt of trees and the moat, and
passed
the penance-groves and paddy-fields
and the
villas in the suburbs with tanks and
gardens of
cocoanut, plantain and areca trees, and
numerous
bamboo water-pandals.[2] They then
saw the
towers of the great Siva and Meenakshi
temples,
the Vishnu temple with the Garuda
standard, the
temple of Balarama with the Plough
emblem, and
of Subrahmanya with the Peacock-Flag.

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1. A Tamil month. Usually, from 16th June to 15th July.

2. Sheds where travellers are given water as an act of charity.

Kovalan requested Kavundi to take care of

Kannaki till
fixed up some

he went round Madura city and residence. She agreed. He entered

the fort-gate, guarded by the fierce swordsmen, and wandered through the

Yavana
streets.
He spent the whole afternoon going through the city. In the evening, he found the fashionable dancing-girls
crowding into the public parks with their rich lovers. As the lights were put on, he saw many young maidens sitting on the terraces with their lovers, decking themselves with garlands of flowers and fresh sandal paste. The bazaars were full of the rich wares of Korkai and Tondi, priceless pearls, corals, incense, ivory, spices, gold, silver, gems and all other things. The goldsmiths and cloth-merchants had their own separate streets.

Kovalan returned, and told Kavundi

and Kannaki about the splendour of the city. Madalan, a Brahmin of Talaichenganam, arrived there, on his return journey from Kanyakumari, and met Kovalan, and told him that he knew him well by repute. He reminded him how he had named his daughter after the Goddess Manimekalai. He said, "I remember well how you saved that aged and bent Brahmin from the clutches of the rogue-elephant that day, and sat between its tusks firmly, curbing the brute. I remember also how you read the Sanskrit verse left behind by the Brahmin who deserted his wife, who had killed the mongoose in error, and made him come back, and made them both glad by giving them much

wealth. I remember, too, how on
witness being about to be executed,
seeing a false
and his young

wife weeping in heart-rending fashion, you offered to be executed in his place. But, Oh Gopala, I see evil things about to overtake you, owing to your deeds in your past birth."

"I too fear so," said Kovalan. "I dreamt that a low-caste man, protected by the King, caused me to mount a horned buffalo, and made Kannaki undergo great agony.* Later on, I and Kannaki attained the great status of those who have renounced all attachment."

Kavundi and Madalan said to Kovalan and Kannaki, "You two had better leave these suburbs, where only monks and ascetics are allowed to live. Go to the city, and live there." Just then, an old shepherdess, Madari, a follower of Kavundi, came there. Kavundi entrusted Kovalan and Kannaki to Madari.

Madari took them to her house, gave them a refreshing bath, and made her daughter, Aiyai, attend on Kannaki.

Kannaki cooked Kovalan's food separately in new vessels supplied by her hostess. Kovalan took his meal. Then, when chewing the delicious betel-leaf given by Kannaki, he said to her,
"Darling, my heart is full of despair. Is there any hope for one who has wasted his days in the company of dancing-girls and rakes and debauchees? I have not been

* A hint of his coming execation. The horned buffalo is the vehicle of Yama, the god of death.

dutiful to my aged parents. I have wronged you too, so young in years, but so old in wisdom.
Even though I asked you not to leave Puhar for

this place, you insisted on coming with me. How courageous you were, in trusting me who came straight from her house!"

"Though you deviated from the right path, my beloved, and your vision became clouded I could see clear, since I kept to the path of virtue. I came along with you, knowing that a real change had come over you," said Kannaki.

"You have given up parents, relations, servants, and comforts, and taken as your sole support patience, modesty, suffering and chastity, and have made me happy. O purest gold, O light of the world, O abode of chastity, O house of virtue, I must rehabilitate myself,

were it
only for you.
of the anklets

I shall go into the city with one and sell
that adorned your beautiful legs, Remain

it, so that I may start my trade afresh.
here till I come back."

He then took one of her anklets, pressed her to his bosom, kissed her tenderly, restrained the tears which involuntarily started from his eyes, and went into Madura city.

CHAPTER XI

Atrocious Injustice

A humped bull went opposite
Kovalan as
he started. He did not know that it was
a bad
omen. He walked on, and, in the bazaar,

saw a master-goldsmith walking in front, with a coat on and pincers in hand, followed by other gold-smiths at some distance. Thinking that this must be the palace-goldsmith, Kovalan approached him and said, "Sir, can you estimate the price of a rare anklet, suitable for a queen?"

"I can only say that I make crowns and regalia for kings," said the goldsmith.

other

Kovalan opened his bundle and handed over the anklet. The goldsmith examined it fasci-natedly. His heart beat with joy. A week back, the queen had handed over to him her chest of

jewels for picking out a ring of which she had wanted a duplicate to be made. He had stolen one of her priceless anklets then, and had, later on, sold it to a *Yavana* merchant who had sailed away the very next day. But, the queen missed the jewel in two days, and raised a hue and cry. He had protested his innocence, when questioned by the King, and had stated that some super-thief must have stolen it, as the Crown Prince's diamond-necklace had been stolen by a man who had passed off as an ambassador from a distant foreign country. Nedun Jeliyan had replied,

"Such things occur but once in a life-time. Even then the Crown Prince knew who the thief was. Suspicion did not fall on others. In this case, the circumstances show that you alone must have stolen this jewel when the casket was handed over to you. Still, I shall not prejudge your case. I give you a week's time to find out the alleged thief and jewel, and my suspicions regarding you shall remain a secret till then. If you fail to produce the thief and jewel in a week, the case will be ordered to be investigated by the City Prefect, and you know that he will find out the truth as easily as oil is extracted from sesamum." These words had caused panic to the state-goldsmith, and he had been praying daily to his family deity to show him some way out of this terrible plight, of practical certainty of exposure, condemnation and execution. And, as if in

answer to those prayers, this stranger from another country had come with an anklet which
tallied exactly in size, weight, workmanship and appearance with the stolen one and which would, therefore, be taken to be the very same one by all at the palace.

The wicked goldsmith thought to himself, "I shall keep this man in my house on the pretext of getting an offer for the jewel from the King,
and then go to the King and offer to show his guards the thief and the jewel. He will surely send them with me with directions to execute the thief,
if caught, red-handed, forthwith, as an example to all malefactors. Thus, I shall escape

my impending doom." He said to Kovalan, "Sir, this is a priceless jewel. The only person who can buy such a jewel is the Queen. I shall go and tell the King. Please wait with the jewel in my humble abode." Then, he returned the anklet, carefully wrapped, to Kovalan, and led him to his house, dismissing the junior goldsmiths, who were following him, with a few words. Kovalan was seated by the goldsmith on a cot in an out-house. Then the goldsmith went to the palace in high spirits. Kovalan too was glad that he had so easily found an enthusiastic admirer of the jewel, and was near to finding a generous purchaser as well.

That day, the Queen had reproached the King with not caring for her as much as before, and, as an instance, had mentioned his failure to recover her stolen anklet. Secretly, she feared that the King was beguiled by the charming dancing-girls who had been entertaining him for a week. So, she had provoked this love-quarrel. Just as the King was emerging from her room, the goldsmith hailed him, prostrated himself before him, and said, "Lord of Justice! I have found out the thief, and have caught him with the anklet, when he had the impudence to come and offer it to me for sale at half its real price. He is now at my house with the stolen jewel. Pray send some guards to seize the jewel and deal with the man suitably." Glad at the recovery of the jewel, and eager to please the Queen by the swift punishment of the thief of her anklet,

Nedun Jeliyan forgot the immemorial law of the land, that none should be punished without a judicial trial, and, calling three palace-guards, said to them, "Go with the goldsmith. If you find the Queen's anklet in that thief's possession, put him to death at once, as a

salutary example to such marauders, and bring the anklet here. Let not not this
thief! Beware!"

man escape like the necklace

The goldsmith took the guards with him, saying to himself, "I have accomplished what I desired." Taking them to Kovalan, he said to him, "These have come here to see the anklet at the bidding of the King." Kovalan showed the anklet, and the palace-guards took it to be the same as the Queen's. Still Kovalan did not look like a thief, and they said to the goldsmith in a whisper, "He does not look like a thief." The goldsmith whispered back to them, "What do you know about thieves, you fools? You see our Queen's stolen anklet with him, and yet prate about his looks. Evidently, he has cast his spell on you, as he did that night when he stole it without having to use a crow-bar or burgling rod. You remember the thief who came dressed as an ambassador, and sneaked into our Crown Prince's room, one dark night, dressed as a woman, and stole his wonderful necklace, with rare diamonds sparkling like the rays of the sun, and eluded our prince's sword and fist, and escaped with his loot and our prince's sword, and was not heard of again.

Do you mean to say that he looked like a thief?

Oh, you, young fellows, must read the book on 'The Art of Thieving,' to understand the mani- fold tricks and magic employed by thieves. Take care you act quickly and despatch this rogue before he suspects us and utters his incantations and makes himself invisible. Do not for the sake of this plausible thief, I beseech you, bring down, on your devoted heads, the terrible wrath of our King. He is a just monarch, and has already given his orders; you have but to carry them out." An illiterate and ambitious guard, on hearing this, hurled his sharp sword at Kovalan's neck, crying out, "Let him run away with this sword if he can!" The sword struck the neck in full, and almost severed it, causing Kovalan to fall down in a pool of blood, mortally wounded.

The guards took the anklet and went

to the King along with the goldsmith. The King too thought that the anklet was the Queen's stolen one, and, so, rewarded the goldsmith and the guards, and rushed to his Queen, saying, "Darling, here is your anklet. And, yet, you were accusing me of apathy about it." Kopperundevi was delighted beyond words at the recovery of her anklet, and at her husband's great efforts to recover it, and was reconciled to him in an instant. The King and Queen then spent some minutes together, after which the King left her, and the Queen took her twilight sleep.

CHAPTER XII

Frantic Grief

Meanwhile, Kannaki began to have vague misgivings at the failure of Kovalan to return soon. "Even during day-time I am shivering. My heart is restless with

grief. I do not see my lord return. Why is he so late about it? Oh, I am getting worried," said she to Aiyai. Aiyai went and told Madari about this. Madari said, "My dear, I too have seen some gruesome portents of impending calamity. The eyes of the big bulls are full of tears. The butter which I tried to melt for taking the ghee to the King's palace to-morrow morning will not melt. The cows are crowding together and bellowing in fear. Their tinkling bells are falling from their necks with- out cause. Oh, some dreadful calamity is about to happen. Let us avert it by having the *Kuravai* dance, to propitiate Balarama and Krishna."

Several girls were then assembled. They performed the *Kuravai* dance, with many songs about Balarama, Krishna and the *gopis*.* There were also songs praising the Pandyan King Nedun Jeliyan, adorned with Indra's garland; the Chola King Karikala, with the golden discus; and the Chera King Senguttuvan who had crossed the ocean and destroyed the Kadambas in their sea-girt island.

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* The shepherdesses of Brindaban.

When the dance was over, the dancers went and bathed in the *Vaigai*. Then, Madari went to worship Nedumal with flowers, incense, sandal-paste and garlands. There she heard, from some one who had come from the city, the news of Kovalan's slaughter for alleged theft of the Queen's anklet.

She returned home hurriedly, and stood near Kannaki weeping, and unable to speak. She simply said, "Oh, my lady!" and broke down. Kannaki said to her, "Friend, speak out! My mind is full of grave forebodings. Even during the day-time, I am

beloved's safety. I

shivering from fear for my
am about to faint from fear

of what news you may be trying to keep back
from me. So, speak at once!"

"The King's officers executed him,
charging
him with having stolen the Queen's
anklet from
the palace," blurted out Madari.

On
hearing this Kannaki sprang up in a rage,
uttering, "What atrocious injustice!"
Then she
cried out, heart-broken, "Oh, where
are you
lying down, my beloved?

Ah, me!" and fainted.

Recovering, she began raving,
"Am I to
suffer, like other widows, and perish in
misery
because I have lost my husband through

the fault
of this King? Am I, O foolish
Goddess of
Dharma, to become a widow and
go, in despair,
to innumerable places
of pilgrimage, because you
allowed this King to deviate from justice
? My
husband a thief! O Sun, witness of all the
deeds

in this sea-girt world, was my husband a
Then was heard a voice, "He was not
thief?"
a thief.
For his unjust execution, this city
will be consumed by flames."

Kannaki took her remaining anklet and said to the shepherdesses, who crowded round her, "O chaste women, living in this terrible city ruled by this unjust King, listen! My husband was not a thief. Unwilling to pay the price of my anklet, the King had him killed; and the anklet was taken away. If I am a chaste woman, you will see me make my husband speak."

She went into the city with the shepherdesses.

The residents of Madura crowded round her, and exclaimed, "Our King's Rod of Justice has become crooked! Lost is the glory of Tennavan, of the moonlike Umbrella and Spear! See this goddess-like woman suffer untold agony!" They took her to the place where Kovalan lay wounded. She saw him, but he could not see her. The sun set just then, and twilight set in, and she lamented so loudly that the whole city reverberated with her wailings. She, who had received from him a warm embrace and a wreath of flowers that morning, saw him

lying in a pool of blood that very evening. She embraced him and bathed him with her tears, exclaiming, "Oh, that your beautiful body should roll in the dust like this in this twilight! Won't you speak a word to your beloved! Are there no good people in this city? Are there no women ,to protest against such injustice? Is there no God in this city, to prevent

the sharp sword of this unjust king from slaughter- ing innocents? O my beloved, speak one word· to me, just one word!"

Kovalan recovered consciousness,

opened his eyes, and said faintly, "Oh, the full-moon face of my beloved has faded!" At once, she clasped his feet, sobbing and wailing. Then Kovalan just gasped out, "Oh my beloved, be here, be here!" and expired, and his soul went up to the heavens, accompanied by a host of unseen gods.

Kannaki said to herself, "Was it real, or was it an illusion? Where shall I go and find out the truth? But, first, my furious wrath must be appeased. I shall seek out the cruel King, and expose his injustice. Then, my beloved's corpse shall be burnt along with this unjust city itself." She then remembered the terrible dream, which she had recounted to Devandi, and shuddered, and said to hereself, "How these evil dreams come true!"

Rising up, she went to the palace in search of the King.



CHAPTER XIII

Terrible Revenge

Nedun Jeliyan's Queen, Kopperundevi, had horrible dreams during her twilight sleep that evening. She rushed to the King and said, "Great King! I dreamt that your Sceptre and Umbrella fell down. The Bell of Justice at the palace gate went on ringing, as if some appalling injustice was done. A rainbow appeared in the night, and a meteor by day. Oh, I fear some dreadful calamity, my lord. Such portents are said to have appeared when your great ancestor, Ugra Pandyan, threw his spear at the sea, to stop

its erosions when it rose in fury and swallowed up the entire Kumari country and the *Pahruli* river. What will happen now, I shudder to think."

Just then, the gate-keeper came and told the King, "Sire, a terrible lady, resembling some fierce goddess, is waiting at the gate. She is as self-confident as Korravai, the goddess of Victory, and as terrible as Kali. She has with her a priceless anklet, and her face is stained with tears." "Bring her in," said the King.

Kannaki was brought into the King's presence.

"O lady with the tear-stained face, who are you, and what has brought you here?" asked the King.

"I come, O rash monarch, from the famous city of Puhar, one of whose Kings[1] gave his flesh to an eagle to save a dove, and another of whose Kings,[2] when a cow pulled the Bell of Justice, ordered his only son to be crushed under his own chariot-wheels for rashly running over a calf. From that city, a noble merchant, Kovalan, son of Masathuvan, driven by an evil Fate, came to your realm, and was murdered under your orders while trying to sell one of my anklets. I am his wife. My name is Kannaki."

"Lady, how dare you call that a murder? It is the duty of kings to deal out justice and put thieves to death," said the King.

"To put to death an innocent man is not justice. It is murder, pure and simple," said Kannaki.

"You are his wife, and, so, will go on saying that he was innocent. But, he was caught red-handed with the stolen anklet of my Queen," replied the King.

"*He* was not the anklet-thief. *You* are the anklet-thief," said Kannaki. "To think that you too call yourself a King, like Manu and Sibi,

you who lost your reason by the loss of your Queen's anklet, and ordered an innocent man to be killed for a theft he did not commit! Are you not ashamed to sit there, with that woman

1. Sibi.
2. Manuneetikanda Cholan.

by your side, pretending to deal out justice, while committing the most unjust murders?"

"How dare you say all this?" asked Nedun Jeliyan, in wrath.

"Because it is the truth," said Kannaki, "and I can prove it."

"Prove it or die!" roared the King. "Here is the anklet recovered from your husband," and took it and handed it over to her.

Kannaki examined the anklet, satisfied herself that it was the one given by her to Kovalan, and said, "It is easy to prove it. What was inside your Queen's anklet?"

"The finest pearls," said the King.

"And inside mine were the purest rubies.

See now what this anklet, foolishly contended by you to be your Queen's, contains," and she dashed it against the floor. The purest rubies flew out of the jewel, which broke. At that very instant, the Royal Umbrella fell down, and the King's Rod of Justice became crooked. Kannaki, in terrible anger, threw the other anklet also on the ground, crying out, "See what this too contains!" Rubies flew out of it too.

Nedun Jeliyan exclaimed in agony, "I am unfit to be a ruler, I who listened to the lying words of a goldsmith and had an innocent man put to death! It is I who am the thief! I have failed to do Justice. Let me die at once! O God, what have I done in my haste? Put to death

a most innocent man, and made his chaste wife
a widow! How can I
meaner men can? The

attribute it to Fate, as
proverbial justice of the
Minavan has been violated. See, the great
sceptre of Justice bends in my very hands, even
as I hold it! The Lord has, through this lady,
sent me a fit retribution. Wait, O divine rod, do not *break*! I shall atone for my error by my
death. May this sin end with me, and not affect
my line!", and he had a stroke, and died.

the

The Queen, Kopperundevi, too, fell down on floor by his side. Clasping his feet, she
worshipped them, and said "Let me follow you, my lord.
It is impossible for me to live on
without you".

Kannaki said to her, "Oh, great

Queen, I am

the victim of a cruel Fate. I am not learned. But one thing is certain, that he who does harm to another will surely have to pay for it. Another thing, too, is equally clear, the power of a chaste woman, however helpless to all outward appearance. Hear what some chaste women of my town have done. A noble woman, on being accused of unchastity, called the kitchen and a tree to witness, and the Lord made them bear witness for her. Another, being asked to protect an image of her husband, made on a river-bed with sand, would not leave it despite the oncoming floods, and, lo! the floods encircled her and her husband's image without harming them. King Karikala's daughter, Adimandi, did not know swimming but just rushed into the roaring waters

of the estuary of the *Kaveri* to rescue her husband, Vanjikkon,* who was being drowned and carried

away by the waves, and the astonished waves restored him safely to her. Another chaste lady, unable to live separated from her husband, when he had to go overseas, turned herself into a stone image on the seashore, but recovered her own form when her husband came back and touched her. A fifth, seeing her co-wife's child, entrusted to her, fall into a well by accident, threw her own child into the well after it, so that she might be sure of saving the other child, in her anxiety to save her own, and saved both. A sixth changed her beautiful form into that of a black monkey, on seeing strangers gaze at her when her husband was away, but changed back into her own form when her husband returned. A seventh heard her mother bewail one day her foolish promise to her maid-servant to contract a marriage between their expected children, if they happened to be of opposite sexes, and went straight to the maid-servant's son and clasped his feet as those of her lord and husband, and solved

the problem. I, too, am a chaste wife from that same Puhar where these seven women lived and died. You will see that I shall destroy this city by flames as a lesson for this atrocious injustice." When she had finished, she looked and saw that the Queen she was addressing was dead.

Then, she twisted off her left breast with her right hand, and hurled it at Madura city, crying

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* King of Vanji or the Chera country.

out, "If chastity can produce fire, then, let this city of this unjust King, who had my husband put to death as a thief, be burnt to ashes! May this city be consigned to flames! May all be burnt except the righteous ones chaste women, old people

and Brahmins, cows, and children! This city shall pay for its

King's crime and for depriving me of the joy of having a child to be fed at my breast."

At once, Agni, the God of Fire, appeared before Kannaki in the shape of a Brahmin, blue in hue, with a red tuft and milk-white teeth, and said, "I shall carry out your orders." Then he opened his burning mouth, and the city was enveloped in flames. It was Friday, the eighth day of the dark fortnight, and the first of the month of *Adi*,[1] and *Bharani-Karthik*[2] day.

The Guardian Deities of the city,[3] the *Brahmana-bhutam*, pearl-white in colour, and with unfolded umbrella, staff, water-bowl, fire-stick and *kusa*[4] grass, Vedas and sacred thread, the *Kshatriya-bhutam*, coral-red in colour, with war-drum, umbrella, feather-fan, flag, goad, spear and rope; the *Vaisya-bhutam*, brown in colour, with

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1. *Adi* is a Tamil month running, usually, from 16th July to 15th August.

2. *Bharani* and *Karthik* are stars.

3. These four were the deities of the four main castes, the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, called here Velans or farmers.

4. Sacred grass.

balance, lamp-stand and Veena, water and paddy-seeds; and the *Velan-bhutam*, sapphire-black in colour, and with plough in hand; all these knew beforehand about the fire, and departed from the four quarters even before it spread into the streets.

The terrible flames burnt down almost the entire city. Dancing-girls in their gaudy dresses, soldiers in their uniforms, merchants in their shops, coolies pushing their hand-carts, were all overtaken by it unexpectedly, and in the middle

of their activities, and burnt to cinders. People stood aghast and helpless, like figures in a painting, when overtaken by the all-consuming fire.



CHAPTER XIV

The Goddess of Chastity

Even the survivors did not blame Kannaki, as they considered it to be a just retribution for the atrocious injustice done to her and her husband, though they greatly marvelled at the power of her chastity, and called her forthwith *Patnidevi*, "Goddess of Chastity."

As the flames reduced the great city to ashes, Madhurapati, the Goddess of the City, wandered hither and thither along the streets and lanes, sorrowful and bewildered. Finally, she appeared before Kannaki, whose victory was greater than that of Sarasvati, Lakshmi or Parvati, and said to her, "Listen to my complaint, my lady."

Kannaki asked her, "Who are you who

follow me from behind? Are you aware of my great wrong and consequent agony?"

"I am. But, hear me, and then you will understand everything," said Madhurapati. "My ears have heard only Vedic chants in this city till to-day, when they heard the bell of outraged justice ringing. You need not think that Manuneeti-kanda Cholan and Sibi have no counterparts in this Royal line. Once, the great Vedic scholar, Parasara, who was given many valuable jewels by the Chera King Kelukuttuvan, passed the village of Tangal. Being pleased with the Vedic recital of a young Brâhmin boy called Alamarselvan, son of Varttikan, he presented him

with some of the Chera King's priceless gifts, namely, a sacred thread of pearls and costly bangles and ear-rings. The boy was, later on, falsely accused, by the jealous village-officers, of having become rich by concealing treasure-trove belonging to the King, and was thrown into prison

under the orders of the King. His mother was frantic with grief. In consequence of this injustice, the door of the Kali temple would not open. The King suspected that some unremedied wrong was at the bottom of it, and, on enquiry, came to know of Alamarselvan's unjust imprisonment. At once, he, who had not bent his knee to any man on earth, prostrated himself before Varttikan, granted Tangal and Vayalur in perpetuity to him tax-free, and released Alamarselvan. The door of the temple opened with a mighty sound heard throughout the city. The King, in joy, ordered a general remission of axest and the release of all prisoners He also ordered that, thenceforth, all treasure-trove should belong to the finder, so as to prevent the possibility of such unjust punishment thereafter. In addition, he dismissed the village-officers responsible for this act of injustice.

"But, impelled by Fate, this very monarch has committed atrocious injustice as regards your husband. Hear the reason.

"There was a prediction that on Friday the *Ashtami** day in the dark fortnight of *Adi*, when

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* The eighth day of the fortnight.

the stars Kartikai and Bharani were in the ascendant, this King of the Pandyas would die, and his city consigned to flames. Thus, Fate has brought about the injustice you suffered from. But nothing happens by accident; everything is the result of *Karma*, the effect of actions in previous births. In days of old, there were two cousins, Vasu and Kumara, who ruled over Simhapura and Kapilapura in the Kalinga country. They were always at war. Simhapura had fair and fertile fields surrounded by a thick grove of trees. Kapilapura had impenetrable bamboo forests all round it. Owing to the war, both Kings made an area of twelve miles round their capitals forbidden territory for all foreign merchants. A foreign merchant called Sangama, anxious to break the blockade and sell his wares, went with his wife and a load of valuable wares, and sold them in

Simhapura. Your husband, Kovalan, was in his previous birth, Bharata, the highest police officer of Vasu. He suspected the innocent Sangama to be a disguised spy of Kumara, and made a report to that effect to the King who had him executed, implicitly believing Bharata's report. The innocent man's wife, Neeli, was frantic with grief, and raved for fourteen days, crying out to the King, the subjects, and, indeed, to all the persons present, "O King, is this your justice? O Vaisyas, is this your justice? O residents of this place, is this your justice?" Thus she raved for fourteen days. Then, on the fifteenth day, a particularly sacred day, she climbed up a cliff and jumped down in order to join her husband in

heaven. As she jumped to her death, she uttered the following curse: 'He who has inflicted this injury upon my husband shall be overtaken by a similar fate in his next birth. Though innocent,

he shall be accused of a heinous crime, when
honestly selling his article, and shall be executed
off-hand. His wife shall suffer from frantic grief,
even as I do, but shall find her peace and join her
husband in heaven, from a cliff, after fourteen days.' Now, you see why all these things have happened."

Kannaki listened to this story with wonder and growing understanding. Then, with her consent, Madhurapati released the city from the conflagration.

Kannaki said to herself, "I shall not rest till I join my lord." She went to the temple of Korravai[1] and broke her golden bangles in token of her widowhood. Then she left Madura city by the western gate, exclaiming, "My husband and I entered this city together by the eastern gate. Alas, I am going out, alone, by the western gate." She walked along the flooded banks of the *Vaigai*, like one possessed, reckless of whether there were hills or pits or stones or thorns on her path.

Finally, she reached the hill sacred to Neduvel[2] and rested in a *Vengai*[3] grove crying out, "Oh, I am a great sinner." Some hill-folk went to where she was. Struck by her beauty and grave

1. Goddess of Victory; Durga.
2. Muruga, or Vela, or Andi, or Subrahmanya, or Skanda.
3. The Kinn tree, *Pterocarpus bilobus*.

dignity, they asked her, "Are you the divine Valli, the consort of Vela?" "No," said she. "I am the unfortunate one who lost her husband by the unjust act of the great Pandyan, and set Madura in flames in my anger. I am waiting to be taken by my husband to heaven." They asked in wonder, "When will this marvel occur?" "In fourteen days," said Kannaki. The astonished hill-folk went to a near spot, and camped there in order to see the miracle. When fourteen days had passed, Indra himself went down to the hill in a divine air-ship with Kovalan, seated Kannaki by the side of Kovalan, and took her to heaven, saluting her as the Goddess of Chastity.

Senguttuvan, the Chera Emperor, was camping on the banks of the *Periyar* or *Bharata* river, accompanied by his Queen, Ilango Venmal, and a host of beautiful damsels. His Queen had expressed a desire for a change, from her silver-white palace on the sea-shore, with its park and artificial lakes and fountains, for a mountain camp by the side of some river and real waterfalls. So, a camp was pitched near the river and some fine falls in the Ghats, amidst *Kongu*, *Vengai*, *Konarai* and *Aram* trees, and with plenty of bees, beetles, and wild beasts in the vicinity. There the King and Queen camped happily, witnessing the dances and hearing the songs of the hill women about Subrahmanya, and going out now and then to see the collection of honey and the trapping of elephants. Ilango Venmal and the ladies were considerably amused to see some hill

tribes living on platforms erected on trees, for fear of depredations by tigers, elephants and pythons, during the nights, and their fare of bamboo rice and honey.

The simple hill folk, who had witnessed Kannaki's ascent to heaven, went to Senguttuvan's camp. They gave him their usual tributes of elephant tusks, deer-skins, whisks of deer-hair, pots of honey, chips of the finest sandalwood, lumps of *sindura*, loads of *anjana* and *ahil*, beautiful *aritara*, cardamom pods, green pepper, arrow root flour, ripe cocoanuts, delicious mangoes, rare medicinal herbs, luscious jack fruits, sugarcane, flowers, areca nuts, big bananas, lion cubs, tiger cubs, small deer cubs, fawns, mongooses, peacocks, civet cats, *minas* wild hens and multi-coloured parrots. Senguttuvan received them graciously, and ordered his chamberlain to give the hill folk clothes, salt, chillies, jaggery, rice and sea-shells, as return presents. The hill folk thanked him, but lingered, and said, "O great king, we have been your humble lieges for seven generations now. May you be always victorious! A wonderful thing has been seen by us just now in your kingdom. That is why we have hurried hither. Under a *vengai* tree in the forest, on Muruga's hill, we saw a lady of resplendent beauty, but

with one breast plucked out, and suffering greatly in mind and body. Fourteen days later, a great Celestial Being came down in his aerial car and took her bodily to heaven, in that car, along with her husband, after praising her chastity. We do

not know who that lady is, or who her parent are. But we saw this marvellous event happe within Your Majesty's dominions, and thought i our duty to inform you. May your line rule thi kingdom for hundreds of years!".

Sattan, the author of "*Manimekalai*," wa then a guest of Ilango Adigal, the King's brothe who had become a monk in order to falsify prediction that he would become a king, an thus appease the fears of his elder brothe Senguttuvan. Sattan was present when the hil folk narrated the marvel to the King. He tol the King and the assembled persons the full stor of the unjust execution of Kovalan, the deat of Nedun Jeliyan and Kopperundevi, and th burning of Madura city. All listened with ra attention. At last, Senguttuvan said, "It is goc

that the Great Pandyan died. Thereby, th Sceptre, which had become crooked by his act of injustice, has become straightened." Then, turn ing to his Queen, Ilango-Venmal, he said to he "One chaste lady fell dead embracing h husband's feet, saying, 'let me follow my lord Another, in wrath, set fire to Madura city, showe to the world the power of a chaste woman, ar came to our kingdom and ascended bodily heaven, escorted by her husband and by Indr Speak, who is the greater one."

"May the Pandyan Queen, whose soul depar ed before she experienced the pangs of wido hood, enjoy heavenly bliss! Let us duly hono this Goddess of Chastity who ascended bodily

heaven from our land, by constructing a temple for her with a suitable idol," replied Ilango-Venmal.

Senguttuvan consulted his councillors. They said that the idol could be made with a slab taken from the sacred Podiyil hills and washed in the waters of the *Kaveri*, or from the Himalayas and washed in the holy *Ganges*. "It will be nothing grand for us to take a slab from the Podiyil Hills.

Let us bring a slab from the mighty Himalayas, the abode of snow, the home of Uma, Gauri, Dakshayani and Sati," said Senguttuvan. His minister, Villavan Kodai, said, "May Your Majesty prosper! Your victories over the Konkanis, Kalingas, Karnatakas, Gangas, Kattis, Bengalis, and Kadambas are famous. Your taking your mother to bathe in the *Ganges*, defeating the Aryan hosts, is still more famous. Proclaim a message to all Kings of Jambudvipa * as follows, by tom-toming in our city: 'We intend to lead a military expedition to the Himalayas merely in order to take a slab of stone to carve the image of a Goddess.' Seal a formal order to that effect with the Tiger, Fish and Bow emblems, the flags of the three Kingdoms of Tamil Nadu, and grant copies to the envoys of all the States of Jambudvipa at our Capital. These envoys will inform their kings speedily."

Senguttuvan did accordingly. The Aryan Kings of North India spoke contemptuously of the three Tamil Kings, and of the Tamils in general,

* India.

on the occasion of the *swayamvara* of a princess of Kanauj, "It is almost impossible to believe how these puny princelings of the South were able to come North and carve on the Himalayas their emblems, the Bow, the Fish and the Tiger. There were then no kings in North India half as powerful as ourselves. So, these southerners, black as crows, came and crowed over the people here," said they. Several holy men from the Himalayas, who had gone to see Senguttuvan at Vanjikkaruvur, informed him about these contemptuous remarks. Senguttuvan was furious. He assembled his troops, and those of his allies, and marched with a mighty army northwards.

The Nootravarkannar or Satakarnis* aided him. They enabled him to cross the *Ganges* safely and comfortably in a fleet of boats. On the northern bank, Senguttuvan defeated a mighty Aryan army led by a regular league of princes, Uttara, Vichitra, Rudra, Bhairava, Chitra, Simha, Dhanurdhara, Sveta, Kanaka and Vijaya, and routed it with terrible slaughter. He gave no quarter, but pursued the fleeing enemy troops and killed thousands of them. Then he and Villavan Kodai marched on the Himalayas, and had a suitable slab cut from there for making the

image of the Goddess of Chastity.

On his return journey, Senguttuvan held a Durbar on the southern bank of the *Ganges*. The slab was bathed in the holy waters and exhibited. The Brahmin Madalan went there, and said to

* The Andhras.

him, "Oh, great King, I bring you news from Madura and Puhar. Madari, ashamed at not being able to protect the guests entrusted to her by Kavundi, fell into a fire and committed suicide. Kavundi committed *sallekhana*, and starved herself to death. I went to Kaverippattinam and broke the news to the parents of Kovalan and Kannaki. Masathuvan gave away all his wealth, and entered a Buddhist monastery as a monk, disgusted with the world. His wife, Kovalan's mother, died broken-hearted, like, Kannaki's mother. Kannaki's father, also, distri-

buted to the poor everything he had, and entered the Ajivaka Order, and is now engaged in severe penance. Madhavi too was plunged in grief. She shaved her head and entered a Buddhist monastery. She took Manimekalai too with her and initiated her as a novice."

"What happened to the wicked goldsmith, the root-cause of all this tragedy?" asked Senguttuvan.

"He was burnt in the great fire caused by Kannaki. All the goldsmiths of the town, a thousand in number, were offered up as human sacrifice to the Goddess of Chastity by Ver Cheliyan, the younger brother of Nedun Jeliyan, who has succeeded him, in order to avert a big drought. Rains fell in torrents after this sacrifice," said Madalan.

"How many things have happened since we left the south!" exclaimed Senguttuvan.

"Your Majesty must remember that it is thirty months since you started," replied the Brahmin.

Senguttuvan then weighed himself against gold, and gave it as a gift to Madalan.

He returned with his army and the precious slab, borne on the heads of Kanaka and Vijaya, to the Chera country. He sent a special ambassador, Neelan, to the Pandya and Chola Kings to tell them about his vindicating the honour of Tamil Nadu by chastising the arrogant Aryan Kings for their contemptuous remarks regarding the Tamils. But, the Chola and Pandya kings deprecated his senseless slaughter of a retreating and defeated foe, as unworthy of a Tamil king, and also deplored his disturbing the penance of the holy sages on the banks of the *Ganges* and in the Himalayan valleys with his vainglorious acts of war. When Neelan reported all this, Senguttuvan was angry with the other two Tamil kings for this criticism, and would fain have gone to war with them, but Madalan pacified him. He reminded him of the need to leave off worldly ambitions at his age and to take to prayers and sacrifices for his soul's salvation, as befitted a great Kshatriya king like him. Senguttuvan then released the Aryan Kings, allotted to them a good mansion to live in, and arranged for a grand Vedic sacrifice to be performed under the auspices of Madalan, on the date of the consecration of the temple.

Then, on an auspicious day, the beautiful

image of the Goddess of Chastity, carved out of

the Himalayan slab, was installed in a fine temple[1] erected for that purpose in Vanjikkaruvur,[2] the Capital of the Chera Kingdom. All the prisoners were released, and all arrears of taxes remitted. The Vedic sacrifice began in full swing. Then, the idol of Kannaki was decorated with choice ornaments of the most exquisite work-manship and duly consecrated and worshipped.

Devandi, Visalakshi, Marakadam and Aiyai reached the place just then. Devandi told the King. "I am a friend of this Deity born in the Himalayas, and bathed in the *Ganges*, and now honoured and protected by you and the other Tamil Kings." Marakadam said, "I am the nurse of this fair one who did not show her anger even towards Madhavi, and went fearlessly hand-in-hand with her husband into the dreadful forests where even a drink of water could not be

had." "I am the companion of this lady who left her house with her husband at once, like a model wife, without a word to her aged parents or nurse or me," said Visalakshi.

"Oh, dear one," said Devandi, addressing Kannaki's idol, "I was a fool. I could not see the meaning of the dream you narrated to me. Your mother and mother-in-law died of grief the moment they heard the sad news from Madura. Did you hear that, my friend?"

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1. The famous temple at Cranganore.

2. Most probably, Tiruvanjikkalam, a mile from Cranganore, on the West Coast.

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"Did you hear, little mother, about your father and father-in-law renouncing the world?" asked Marakadam.

"Oh, did you hear of the renunciation of Madhavi and Manimekalai, more wonderful than that of the two elders?" asked Visalakshi.

"Do you see this unmarried girl, Aiyai, the daughter of Madari who burnt herself to death because she could not see to the safety of Kovalan

entrusted to her by Kavundi?" asked Devandi, pointing to Aiyai.

"Oh, what is this? What is this, this lightning-like figure with golden anklets, waist-belt, bangles and golden-ear-rings? Ah, it is Kannaki in the form of the Goddess of Chastity, showing herself in the air and blessing this ceremony!" exclaimed Senguttuvan.

Kannaki showed her divine form to him, and said, "The Pandyan is blameless. He is now an honoured guest of Indra. He is like a father unto me, for he was the cause of my release from earthly bondage."

The maidens of Vanji then worshipped her with songs and dances. Devandi told Senguttuvan how the beautiful Manimekalai, with coral lips, pearl-like teeth, fascinating breasts, well-rounded thighs, dark silken tresses, melting eyes and shapely feet, and already the most exquisite and natural danseuse of the day, had also entered the monastery. "Madhavi called her and removed

her locks, and got her admitted," said she. "Even the great saint, Aravana Adigal, exclaimed, 'I am

filled with grief at seeing her change in appearance at such an early age'."

"Oh, what a priceless gem has been thrown into the salty sea!" exclaimed Senguttuvan.

Devandi then became possessed by Sattan. The garland of flowers in her hair hung loose; her brows began to quiver; her coral lips were trembling; her white teeth formed a strange unearthly smile; her words were not normal; her face perspired; her eyes were red; and her hands were lifted up in a threatening manner. She said, "Among the audience present here are three beautiful girls, all two years old, the twin girls of Arattan Setti, and the little daughter of Sedakkudumbi. Madalan! Know me to be Pashandan or

Sattan appearing within the person of this Brahmin lady. I gave you a pot of water in a net-bag in the Mangala Devi temple; sprinkle some of that water on these three girls, and they will forthwith remember their past births."

The astonished Madalan, who had been given a pot like that by the priest in that temple, took it and sprinkled some water on those three little girls. At once, one of the daughters of Arattan Setti remembered her previous birth as the mother of Kannaki, and cried out, "Oh my daughter, Oh my darling! Why did you leave me without a word? Come and relieve me of my sorrow." Her twin sister rembered her previous birth as Kovalan's mother, and cried out, "In the darkness of

the night you left with darling Kannaki, my son. Come back to me, and console me."

Madalan said, "Because of their equally great attachment to Kannaki in their past birth, they have been born in this birth as twin sisters."

The daughter of Sedakkudumbi remembered her previous birth as Madari, and cried out, "O my dear! I heard the dreadful news at the river. Where did you go thereafter, my darling? Where have you hidden yourself?"

"Because of her devotion to Krishna in her previous birth, and performance of the *Kuravai* dance to avert evil from Kannaki, she has now been born as the daughter of this priest of Vishnu's famous shrine at Adakamadam.* Good and bad deeds have their repercussions on the kind of re-birth we have. Certain it is that those who are born shall die, and that those who die will be re-born till salvation is got. Great King, born through the grace of Siva, pile up good deeds and avoid evil deeds so that you may get better and better births, and, ultimately, salvation."

Senguttuvan endowed the temple of the Goddess of Chastity with the greatest munificence. He directed Devandi to offer daily worship in the temple with flowers, perfume and incense. Then he and the Kings of Avanti and Ceylon and the released Aryan princes circumambulated the shrine thrice, and offered their prayers. Gajabahu

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* Anantasayanam at Trivandrum.

of Ceylon, the King of Malwa, the ruler of Kongu, and the Aryan Kings prayed to Kannaki, "Please grace our countries also with your Presence, just as you have done on this auspicious day at Imayavaramban's* sacrifice." Then a voice was heard, "I have granted the boon". Senguttuvan and other Kings praised the Deity in pregnant words, and entered the sacrificial hall with Madalan. Devandi became once more god-possessed. She cried out, "Oh ye fortunate ones assembled here, who have heard the Goddess of Chastity speak! Be above pleasure and pain. Know God, and serve those who have known Him. Speak not falsehood. Avoid tale-bearing. Refrain from meat-eating. Abstain from inflicting unnecessary injury on others. Give gifts. Perform penances. Do not give false evidence. Never forget the good done to you. Despise bad friendship. Avoid the unrighteous. Seek the company of the wise and virtuous. Stick to truth always. Avoid other men's wives. Succour the helpless. Abstain from drinking, theft, adultery, falsehood and gay company. Youth, wealth and the body can never be everlasting. So, seek the path leading to Heaven, and cling on to it, ye denizens

of the earth! God is the Life of Life, and Death of Death. He is beyond the mutable and the immutable. Attune your heart human to the heart divine, and attain Union with Him. That is the goal. Awake! Arise! Stop not till the goal is reached!"

* Senguttuvan. Literally, he whose frontier is the Himalayas.

Then, the whole assembly sang with one voice the following prayer to the Goddess of Chastity, specially composed for the occasion by Madalan :—

She made the city burn,
She made rains fall in drought,
She made the Pandyan learn
The might of faith free from doubt.

Her husband was her only God,
For him she gave up ev'rything
She avenged the death of her lord,
And made poets about her sing.

Let's worship this Goddess Great

•Who to Heaven went in State,
Be her, for eternity,
The Goddess of Chastity !

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